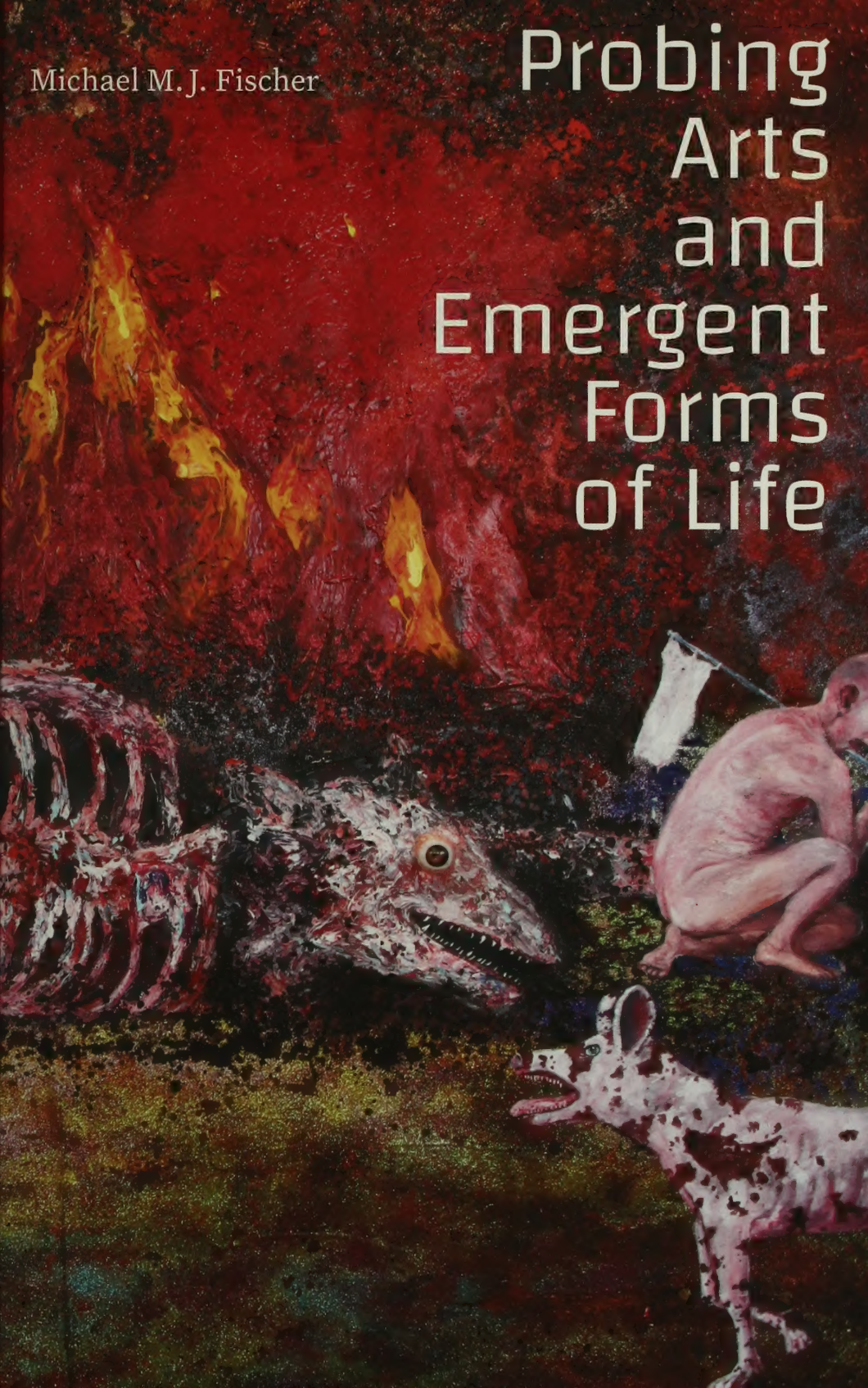
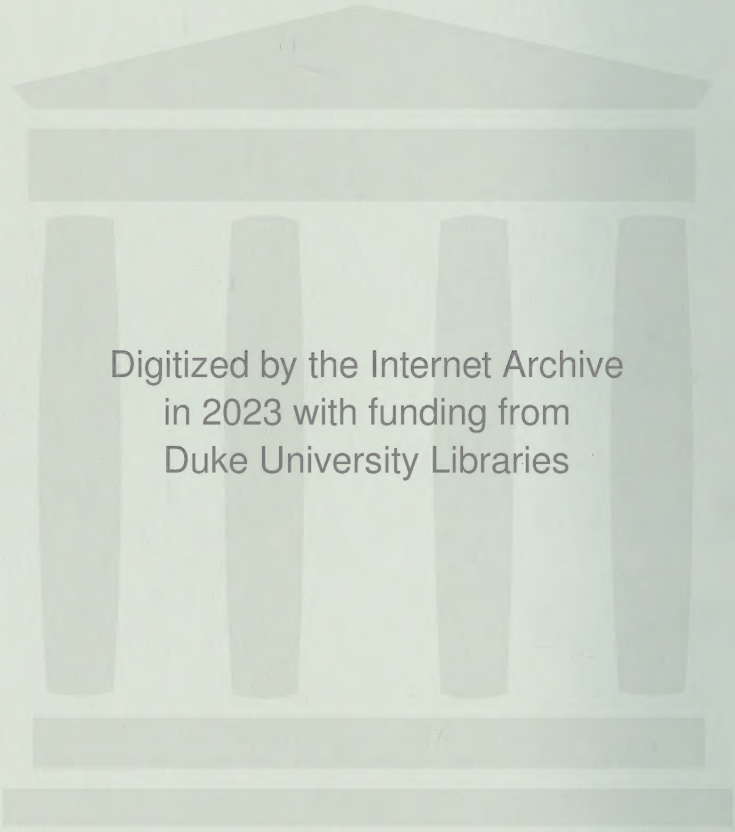
Michael M. J. Fischer

Probing Arts and Emergent Forms of Life

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Probing Arts and Emergent Forms of Life

EXPERIMENTAL FUTURES
Technological Lives, Scientific Arts,
Anthropological Voices *A series edited*
by Michael M. J. Fischer and Joseph Dumit

Probing Arts and Emergent Forms of Life

Michael M. J. Fischer

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TO MY TEACHERS IN THE VISUAL

AND PERFORMANCE ARTS:

Sally Smart, Entang Wiharso, and Christine Cocca

Charles Lim and Li Lin Wee

Zai Kuning, Kuning Suleiman, and Tetsu Saitoh

Kiran Kumar, Edith Podesta, and Aravinth Kumarasamy

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issue in 2013 at the time of Ken Kwek's release of his three-part film anthology *Sex.Violence.FamilyValues*.

At NUS, Ryan Bishop and John Phillips welcomed me and became intellectual friends. At the National University Hospital of Singapore (NUHS), psychiatrist and writer Kua Ee Heok's memoir of being a young psychiatrist at Woodbridge Hospital figures prominently in my essay on aging societies in *American Ethnologist* and figures again in the forthcoming volume *At the Pivot of East and West*. I remember, among other things, a conversation in which he bemoaned and admired the loss of a promising medical student, now a prominent playwright and theater practitioner, letting me into backstories and histories one might otherwise not have access to.

At the Nanyang Technical University (NTU), I am indebted first of all to Kwok Kian Woon, who was an early and rich source of conversation about the arts. He took me to a few openings—at the Singapore Art Museum, at the Esplanade, at the Kuo Pao Kun Theater Festival—and remains an imagined reader for me in these pages, the following volume, and hopefully one on the theater arts.

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cene, the history field-trip visit to the edges of the demilitarized zone, and especially, for this volume, the opportunity to engage with the Korean art world at the Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (and some of the galleries in Seoul) and to integrate that with the science studies and history concerns.

The Goodman Arts Centre (where Aravinth Kumarasamy, Kiran Kumar, and Boo Junfeng welcomed me), the Aliwal Arts Centre (where the RAW Moves dance company was based and where Edith Podesta premiered her *Indices of Vanishment* before the company moved to The Goodman Arts Centre, where Kiran Kumar performed a piece from his Archipelago Archives [chapter 6]), and the Blue Jazz Club (where Chris Christy's pickup band and friends played weekly) were also key venues for meeting people.

The Singapore Art Museum (SAM), I used to say, was always the first place I visited when I came back to Singapore. It was the place one could see what was happening in Southeast Asian art. While the new National Gallery of Art is now splitting that role with the SAM, I look forward to when the refurbished SAM re-opens. Similarly, STPI (formerly the Singapore Tyler Print Institute) was a place to see accomplished artists learning to work with the print and papermaking medium, in a welcoming atmosphere created by Emi Eu, the director, and the ever-informative and delightful master printmaker Eitaro Ogawa. Among the international artists who came to work and particularly engaged my attention were, from Korea, Do Ho Suh; from Indonesia, Heri Dono, Entang Wiharso, and Eko Nugroho; and, from the Philippines, Ronald Ventura and Geraldine Javier (one of whose collage works I saw there, instantly thought of Donna Haraway's work, and helped broker it to be the book cover for *Staying with the Trouble*). The National Museum of Singapore hosted an important conference on biennials, art fairs, and curatorial visions, which helped introduce me to a number of key players in the region.

As with Tembusu College, I also owe an enormous debt of gratitude to the Singapore University of Technology and Design (SUTD), with which I was associated, thanks to MIT, for a decade from its earliest days, before even the Dover campus days, and as it settled into its campus on Somapah Road. Without the time and freedom to explore, this research could not have been done, and I hope it might be a small return gift in recognition of the humanities and social sciences at the SUTD (and MIT). The SUTD's International Design Center held one of its summit meetings at the Art/Science Museum at Marina Bay, a venue that should become a regular partner.

I thank João Biehl and the Princeton Anthropology Department for the surprise invitation to do the Clifford Geertz Memorial Lecture, which forced me, a bit earlier than I planned, to begin to integrate the arguments of these chapters together. I thank the Princeton department for the warm reception and discussion.

If I turn back to thank more fully the artists listed in the dedication, many of whom figure in the following essays and others in the ones to follow, these acknowledgments will turn into an extended memoir. So I stop here, and only hope that my teachers, these artists, will accept these essays as humble offerings. I should also acknowledge the curators, gallerists, and critics who support the work of these artists, and who deserve an extended essay themselves. They include Shabbir Hussain Mustafa of the National Gallery of Singapore; Tan Siuli, formerly of the Singapore Art Museum, now Southeast Asia curator, National Gallery of Singapore; Emi Eu, executive director, and master printmaker Eitaro Ogawa, of STPI; Inge Santoso and Tommy Sutomo of Can's Gallery (formerly Galeri Canna) in Jakarta; Suwarno Wisetrotomo, curator of the Galeri Nasional Indonesia in Jakarta; Carla Bianpoen (art critic, Jakarta); Natalie King (curator, Melbourne); Jasdeep Sandhu of Gajah Gallery in Singapore; Yohsuke Ishizuka of Ota Fine Arts; Stephanie Fong of FOST Gallery Singapore; Marie-Pierre Mol of Intersections Gallery, Singapore; and Gridthiya Gaweewong in Bangkok.

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Introduction

One is led beyond thinking in terms like modernization and globalization to feeling the clashing rhythms and tempos, the incoherent situations, contradictory developments, and the diversity of people's positions, views, emotions, dreams, and nightmares. —JAN MRAZEK, *WAYANG AND ITS DOUBLES*

The non-communist, post colonies of Asia were key battlegrounds for the defusing of socialist redistributive demands in part by recasting "freedom" as incorporation into the "free world" . . . the unbearable, devastating ambivalence of history. —JINI KIM WATSON, *COLD WAR RECKONINGS*

It is as if parts of the Non-Aligned Movement have reinvented themselves into the World Trade Organization. —C.J. W.-L. WEE, *THE ASIAN MODERN*

This volume contributes to a series of essays—along with those in a companion volume, *At the Pivot of East and West*—on the arts and forms of emergent common sense (or the emergent imaginaries of various multitudes feeling their way into uncertain futures) in the globally interconnected, politically and semiotically media-fraught, Anthropocenic twenty-first century. This is a stage on which, and within which, anthropology is often positioned as a target because it can deploy potent ethnographic tools to analyze, clarify, and make legible the social dramas surrounding films,

pandemics, global protests, popular culture interreferences, and historical accounts that have not been settled but periodically return to haunt the living.[1] I explore how artworks (installations, exhibitions, novels, paintings, creative modern dance performances, videos, and films) provide paraethnographic access to changing worlds, anticipating changes as much as registering them, and often do so as much through their tactics and strategies of composition as their ostensive content.

What I call here "common sense" is what the Italian philosopher Antonio Negri calls the "imagination of the multitude," though I would pluralize the nouns. Negri intuits that there must be a "creative materialism which great painting as well as great theater offer us in the most serious moments of crisis . . . sending out patrols into unknown territory, to observe and to sabotage, but above all to experiment and to reconstruct"; and he hopes to install in us circuits of pleasure and potentialities beyond the claims that there is no outside to capitalism (Negri 2011, 63). This book, I hope, will also shift us away from returning always to the same few European theorists and their referents (Spinoza and love, in the case of Negri). In the end, Negri wants to find "the common" in organizing the "governance of/over/in the forms of life" (Negri 2011, 63). I might call this the changing of common sense as knowledge of biology, life, and organizational behavior deepens, what anthropologists once called "culture" that responds to, and shapes, changing conditions. The theorists I wish to hear are those embedded in, and mobilizing, such creative materialisms in situated geographies, geopolitics, and historical conjunctures in many different places (lest theory become a blind monoculture, repeating itself, not seeing what is different, emergent, or possible). The canon of references needs expansion, wider comparative literacy, fuller multiple gender(s) awareness, as well as ecological, multispecies, and prosthetic-cyborg inquisitiveness. These are calls that have been made repeatedly by anthropologists, early cultural studies (before appropriation and domestication by English departments, instead of multiple languages), subaltern, postcolonial, and decolonial studies, some feminist studies, some Black and race studies, and others. Enough of just waving theoretical hands at "provincializing Europe" or opening up the canon of theory beyond Euro-America with ancient sources as nostalgic tokens: let's actually try to listen not just to individual celebrated intellectuals but to traditions of debate and dissensus, and to situated conditions with their social movements, aware also of their positionings in the global maelstrom of transnational media circuitries.

In these pages, and essays to follow—to name the artworks in kaleidoscopic condensation—feminage (or "cutting and sewing," from modernist Dada puppets to feminist pirates and girls' self-cutting) converses (in Sally Smart's art) with the language of intestines, multiple eyes, and post-wayang superheroes in an Indonesia struggling to fend off terror past and present (in Entang Wiharso's art). In Park Chan-kyong's *Belated Bosal* (2019), the Buddha is sent off, again, on a funeral pyre in a post-Fukushima irradiated forest, and in his *Anyang, Paradise City* (2011), a mix of Asian Gothic and shamanic *min-jung* (people's) art is evoked to deal with the national psychological traumas of the 2014 *Sewol* ferry sinking (killing 245 high school students and 54 others) and the 1988 Green Hill textile mill fire, in which twenty-two female workers died locked in a dormitory, ironically just when the labor movement was at its height. Meanwhile, in the animist and animation art of Ayoung Kim, Yemini refugees in Korea spin in limbo in juxtaposition with spinning cubes of precious metals torn from the mother rock in Mongolia. Cultural critique of the technocratic sublime is redrawn with new video eyes, shot from the sea, in Charles Lim Yi Yong's decade-long project. Margaret Leng Tan and John Cage show us how to listen to the ambient noise of a Singapore housing complex, and filmmaker Tan Pin Pin shows us how to map city life through ambient sound with and without people (Tan P. P. 2005, 2007). Women renarrate Southeast Asian political worlds with surround-sound cinematic motifs and the colors of intergenerational melancholy in cubist painting (in the novels of Sandi Tan, 2012, and Laksmi Pamuntjak, 2019). Weberian rationalities spin out of control (in Daren Goh's [2019] meritocracy thriller). Analytic monsters, like Maxwell's demons and Cartesian evil geniuses, insert themselves (in Kevin Martens Zhi Qiang Wong's *Altered Straits* [2017]). Greek myths inhabit Chinese operatic forms (in Nuraliah Norasid's *The Gatekeeper* [2017b]). Films dissociate and become multiple (in Daniel Hui's hands, 2011, 2014, 2018a). Archipelago life reemerges in Zai Kuning's ghost ships and *ghazal* music, and in Kiran Kumar's modern dance that converses with Indonesian and Indian yogic and martial forms.[2]

Ethnographic nuggets come as *lightning strikes* or *illuminations of recognition*.[3] They often sound the *alert* or *fire alarm* (aprés Walter Benjamin [1928] 1978; Löwy 2005), a warning, a call for help, or for doing something new, breaking out of old habits. There was a flash of illumination when I stumbled upon Henri Matisse's *Woman with Hat* (1905) and instantly recognized through the colors what Laksmi Pamuntjak's narrator, Siri, had been

describing, in *Fall Baby* (2019), about the portrait of Siri's mother, Amba, in Pamuntjak's two-novel (2013, 2019), female-perspective portrait of Indonesia's changing generational conflicts.[4] A similar flash of illumination occurred for me when Sandi Tan described in several published interviews (2012b, 2018a, 2018b, 2018d) that she wrote the female-perspective novel of Singapore, *The Black Isle* (2012a), listening over and over (on a loop) to her favorite film scores. The comment, when I went to check out the film scores, suddenly unlocked for me the emotion-rhythms of a novel that was more than another fictive family saga renarrating Singapore history. More socially powerful *flash points* illuminate deep-play social dramas that unfold in public *reactions* to certain artworks such as the Brazilian film *Bacurau* (Mendonça Filho and Donales, 2019; see Fischer 2021) and the Singaporean film *To Singapore, with Love* (Tan P. P. 2013; Fischer 2023), or in the earlier, excessive reactions to Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* (1988) (Fischer 1990a, 1990b, 2014) or the Mohammad cartoons (Fischer 2009a), which can ignite conflagrations further illustrating what the artwork describes, catching up to the art and exceeding it. Such flash points remind one of the psychoanalytic test of truth: not that the analysand agrees with the analyst's interpretation but rather that the analysand is triggered to produce more discourse that illustrates the problems that brought her or him to the analyst. The results of such lightning strikes and flash points are not simply ephemera but leave legacies in the social fabric. They write their social textualities into the future, leaving their traces, constructing new haunts for transmissible ghosts, new hauntings. They thus also provide lessons learned and aspirations to be forwarded to the next generations.

Ethnographic nuggets can come in the form of vignettes, new rituals or sacralizations, and digital symbols, as in Ayoung Kim's brilliant series of Porosity Valley films and installations (2017b, 2017c, 2019b, 2019c), juxtaposing and substituting shiny metal cubes torn from the mineral earth with war refugees torn from homes in Yemen, seeking a place in Malaysia and Korea (chapter 2); the performance rituals of Zai Kuning (chapter 5); the recovery and renarrations of the history of dance through bodily memory in India and Indonesia (chapter 6); and the entirely new rituals of anatomists and transplant surgeons conferring respect, personhood, and gift receipt on cadavers abandoned by families or resulting from motorcycle accidents in order to deal with their own anxieties about using one life to save another (Sanal 2011). Park Chan-kyong's film *Belated Bosal* (2019) restages the Buddha's funeral in a radioactive noir forest after the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear melt-

down and radiation release, a metaphor for the many toxicities with which we live, and is itself set within a larger installation of his artworks. The 2019–21 global pandemic of SARS-CoV-2 (severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2) or COVID-19 (coronavirus disease, identified in 2019) provides further instances requiring renewed and constant testing and sentinels for the changing external habitats, or multiple natures, within which we live, as well as for our internal immune and microbiome systems, or nature, that continuously deconstruct and reconstruct our bodies from within. These constitute two of the at least four natures to which I have argued we should be paying attention: first nature (our habitats), second nature (human built environments and social education), third nature (our internal biologies, which we are learning to repair and perhaps regenerate from the inside out, genetically, with comparative genomics and with biome understandings), and fourth nature (our companion species). Nature, as I have argued, is both what we are not ("acts of *nature*" for insurance calculations) and what we are (passions are in our *nature*), and *nature* is therefore a sliding signifier, not a binary to culture, or rather the term *culture* is only one of many binary distinctions that can be situationally used (Fischer 2009b, ch. 3). Increasingly, perhaps, we will find ways of sensing and providing feedback for reconstructing our social bodies, healing our structural inequities, modulating our relations with the ecologies within which we live.

Gallery or museum installations can also have art effects through processual rituals, as well as curatorial staging, as I experienced in the double retrospective, titled "Conversation: Endless Acts in History," between the artworks of Entang Wiharso and Sally Smart in Jakarta, which set up triangulations of exchange between Indonesia, Australia, interwar Europe, and America (chapter 2) and between sociohistorical horizons and the pressures within our psyches (figured in cutting and feminage for Smart and in the effects of the "movementality" of the earth and the effects of the electromagnetic forces on human neurology for Wiharso).[5]

Artists have the initial advantage. They are allowed to present unfinished, enigmatic, and unexplained works. Anthropologists return the serve but are required by peer review and editors to frame and explicate, often reductively to something evasively called *theory* or *narrative* (modernization, globalization, neoliberalism), which all too often are just memes posing as theory. Theory must be built up from the ethnography, not deduced from itself.

Theory and ethnography are dialectically related. Less can often be more: an editor-friend advises to focus on "the film, not the footage." But for the anthropologist the footage *is* the film. It is what one goes to films to see, or at least what I go for. The footage is or contains the object of desire, however much, in Lacanian fashion, the object may be elusive. It is the traces, the semantic slippages and allusions, that are the substance of the conjuring. "The film" is but a frame device, sometimes suggesting a point of view, or a take, on the richer complexity ("real world"), to which one again returns. Or, perhaps better is the analogy with the move in documentary filmmaking to dispense with voice-overs (the theory that overwrites the ethnography). As Carlos Fausto, the Brazilian anthropologist who has written one of the most exciting books of the past several decades on Amazonian art, puts it, "The complexity that interests me here is . . . that of the form itself and its power to evoke its non-visible parts and convoke an act of looking, setting off an imaginative projection" (2020, 22). What is "most exciting" for me about Fausto's book is its dedication to, and respect for, the ethnographic material (the footage, not the film), not in some romantic or nostalgic way, but in a way that also pursues historical change, migrations, borrowings, and exchanges.[6]

The following essays are half or a third of a larger project that I have been calling "Art and Emergent Twenty-First-Century Common Sense."[7] Both the terms *common sense* and *sensus communis* have varied in their usages across languages and philosophers and often were at the center of struggles over forms of government, from Thomas Paine's pamphlet *Common Sense* (1776), that is, the sense of the commons, the people, against the tyranny of monarchy, even in its constitutional form; to Antonio Gramsci's arguments about coalitional and cultural politics in the struggle for hegemonic control (Gramsci 1947); or C. S. Pierce's and John Dewey's pragmatist *critical common sense* arising out of the need to deal with emergent crises that call political coalitions into being, mobilizing citizens with and against one another over rights, interests, and justice (Pierce 1905; Dewey 1927).[8] The social nature and historical contexts of all of the above are central to the anthropological understanding of what often are narrated as purely intellectual chess games among philosophers. Without getting enmeshed in these all-too-fascinating philosophical and historical debates, my case material in the current project is to try to think about new forms of understandings in the twenty-first century with the help of artists as fellow ethnographers of emergent forms of life.

As I was assembling these essays, I was invited by João Biehl and the Princeton Department of Anthropology to give the Clifford Geertz Memorial Lecture for 2019. I chose to use Geertz's essay "Art as a Cultural System" ([1976] 1983) as a token starting point to try to articulate what I was trying to do with the essays but also to reconstruct what anthropologists have had to say about art, to broaden it from its often narrow confines, as in the work of another of my teachers, Anthony Forge (who worked on New Guinea art along the Sepik River), or his student Alfred Gell. I have decided to leave the lecture as it was originally presented, in the vocative voice, addressed to Cliff. Memorial lectures are, after all, ancestor rites, one of whose functions is to make present the spirit in order to dialogue with its afterlives. Geertz broadened the scope of what anthropologists had to say about art through his engagement with social historians of art, such as Michael Baxandall, whose work he had us, as graduate students, read, and with social phenomenologists and symbolic analysts, such as Ernst Cassirer and Suzanne Langer, whose influence is signaled in the epigraph for the lecture. Carlos Fausto and Carlo Severi are more recent anthropologists who have also tried to broaden the scope of the field, by bringing in Claude Lévi-Strauss's brilliant writings on art and engaging Native American and New Guinea art with and against the traditions of European art, including their profound effect on European modernist art. So I begin this volume with Geertz as a kind of baseline introduction to the arguments I want to explore, pluralizing and challenging his title and moving into the emergent forms of life of the present through the arts that I think throw some para-ethnographic light on what is emerging. The other essays in this volume are expansions of what is argued (the theory, the narrative), but each has its own integrity of form, and power to both "evoke their settings and convoke acts of looking" (Fausto 2020, 22), recognizing the footage and acknowledging the voices of the people whose lives constitute the footage.

The opening essay, "Synthetic Realism: Postcinema in the Anthropocene" (on the Anthropocene see Steffen et al 2011; Steffen 2019; and Williams and Zalasiewicz 2019), was originally invited by Ute Mehta Bauer, the director of the Nanyang Technical University's Center for Contemporary Art (NTU CCA), to celebrate the annual expositions she and her team have curated, a celebration done under the shadow of the ending of funding for the center. I intended with the original essay both to protest that funding decision (an effort to offload fundraising, if possible, onto the private sector) and to point to the explosive and innovative work being done by the arts in Asia.

The essay, originally titled "Embers of an Exposition," is expanded for this volume by fusing it with two exhibitions at the Seoul Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art that I stumbled upon while attending a conference on the Anthropocene across the street at the Korea Folklore Museum, convened by historian and science studies colleague Professor Buhm Soon Park of the Korea Institute for Advanced Studies. I intend with this fusion to stress both the geographic and the urgent social issues that the artists address, indeed in the spirit of Geertz's formulation about art, "locating in their tenor the sources of their spell" (Geertz 1976 [1983]).

Synthetic realism is the temporary name for what I see emerging as a new art style particularly in Asia but also elsewhere, which I characterize in chapter 2. It resonates, as ethnographically detailed by Jan Mrazek (2019), with the Indonesian wayang (puppet) masters' distinction between the English "realism" and Indonesian *realis* (realism) for non-wayang elements absorbed into wayang from film and television, which after all are part of today's Indonesian reality or realism (chapter 3).

Curation has become a major topic in the arts: how to frame, stage, and put artworks in conversation. To explore curation in the mode of both Fausto's and Geertz's formulations, I slowly walk the reader through an exhibition at the National Gallery in Jakarta that put the artwork of Indonesian artist Entang Wiharso and Australian artist Sally Smart in juxtaposition and conversation. This essay was solicited by the two artists and Christine Cocca, Wiharso's wife and editor of his catalogs. In my original vision for a larger volume, this was to be the opening essay both to remind the reader of the exhibit and exposition setting of much art as it moves from artist studio and galleries to larger national and international stages, and also to demonstrate the enigmatic, open-ended, and allusive qualities of artworks that refuse to be reduced to fixed explanations and theory. While I respect the professionalization of curators and may have something to say elsewhere about biennials and blockbuster business models, I am more interested here in the artist-curators, the way the artists themselves stage and explain and at a point refuse, or are unable, to explain further. Wiharso's artwork initially gave me the idea that something quite different was happening in Asia, something post-Reformasi (the "reform" period after the fall of Suharto's authoritarian regime in Indonesia in 1998), which could no longer be contained in the usual rubrics that curators, art historians, and art critics have been using. I once gave a speed talk at the Singapore University of Technology and Design—we were given two minutes—a pitch for my research proj-

ect. The only thing people remembered, and a number of people came up to comment, was an image of one of Wiharso's colorful artworks that they found exciting in a stimulating and puzzling way. Bingo!

The fourth essay, on the work of Charles Lim, again originally resulted from an invitation from Ute Mehta Bauer to do a keynote for a retrospective of his work at the NTU CCA. I draw on it extensively in the Geertz lecture but ask indulgence for the repetition: putting together a narratable sequence of his work into an overall account was a challenge, given the way pieces were shuffled and rearranged at various times over the course of the decade-plus-long project, and each of the *chapters* or *sea states* is valuable to think with, in its own right, to allow the *imajinasi batin* (inner imagination) to work with the images and videos—as wayang puppeteers might say in criticizing newer, "more efficient," substitutable televisual media forms of presentation and presencing, which, however, allow little time for mystical philosophizing or even just seeing behind the curtain/veil of the illusions that we see in the real world. Lim, like Wiharso and Smart, was always available and helpful, both in the pressured days before the talk that was my introduction to his work—although, as it turned out, I had seen a few of his pieces earlier in other shows at the Singapore Art Museum—and afterward, as I slowly reworked the talk into a longer piece. Lim would have liked the retrospective to have been staged as a site-specific event in an old boat shed near the beach village of Mataikan, on Somapah Road, where he grew up, more appropriate to the coastal and sea concerns of his art. (Somapah Road is now the location of one of my homes in Singapore: the new, decade-old Singapore University of Technology and Design.) But the funders insisted on the NTU CCA venue since they were already supporting that as a national site for displaying art being produced today.

The fifth and sixth essays were inspired by a concert and a dance-installation that I stumbled into. The concert was an entry into traditions of Malay music and the polymath musician and visual artist Zai Kuning, who had me following along in his quest to evoke (and help) the sea peoples and *orang asli* (original people) of the archipelago of the Malay world. As I followed his work, his artwork gradually became a parallel aquatic and archipelago world to Lim's artwork. Like Lim and Wiharso, Kuning has exhibited at the Venice Biennale representing his country, and I watched him prepare for it, though I was not privy to his struggles with curators (which I learned about mostly after the fact). As with Lim, the Venice show was an iteration of many previous shows, one of a series of expanding explorations,

seen better as a series than an event, one that for me began with the magical concert with which the essay opens. As with the Wiharso-Smart *Conversation: Endless Acts in History* exhibition, I try hard to provide the reader with an evocation of what made that evening magical, which is also the tuning fork for Kuning's historical and ethnographic explorations, musically and through his rattan ship sculptures with their cargos of books and mystical-cum-sovereignty-claiming voyages.

I found yet a third voyage across the seas in Kiran Kumar's artwork in dance-cum-installation, tracing gendered forms across the archipelago stretching from South India to Java and Singapore. I had already been engaged with the Apsaras Arts Dance Company and its artistic director, Aravinth Kumarasamy, watching his development of Bharatanatyam into stage shows (with video backdrops) that visualize the shastras of the arts (with dancers coming alive off the carvings of temple walls), the life and travels of the Buddha and Buddhism (from India to Sri Lanka to Cham, Cambodia, and Thailand), and the dramas on the walls of Angkor Wat and Borobudur. He brought senior dancers from India to engage in a discussion of changing generations, which I recount in the essay, which takes me (back) to India and modern developments in so-called classical Indian dance forms. What Kumar is doing for exploring the differences between codes of masculinity in Indian and Indonesian dance, Chandralekha and Padmini Chettur in a different way had been doing for expressing the creativity of the feminine in Bharatanatyam-derived dance, different from the form classicized at the Kalakshetra school of dance in Madras, from which Aravinth Kumarasamy and the Apsaras Arts Dance Company also stem. Kumar and Chandralekha practice quest forms, journeys of discovery and experimentation, into the past and into the emergent future. RAW Moves is the name of the Singapore dance company under whose auspices Kumar staged his choreography and installation at the Goodman Arts Centre.

The arts invoked in this volume are intended to be *probes* into how new forms of life are emerging out of the ruins of the past, sensors of new materialities and emergent forms of common sense, of the dynamics of the sensus communis, of how our nature and its habitats and prostheses are changing. I have done several such essays with artists in the past, with the filmmaker Maria Zmarz-Koczanowicz on Poland after the fall of communism (Fischer 1997); with psychiatrist-artist Eric Avery on his woodblock prints and art-medicine actions in the United States on Somaliland refugee camps, Haitian and Central American refugee detention centers, and an HIV/AIDS clinic

placed in the Harvard Fogg Museum to do institutional therapy (Fischer 2000); and with Parviz Yashar on the legacies of training at the Los Angeles art school that produced designers for the Detroit automobiles, for the BART rapid transit, and early levitating trains—which was home to the color theorists who worked on the Works Progress Administration public mosaics in California—and on his own work on the above projects as well as for Wedgwood ceramics and modular furniture design, and his commentaries in painting on these and other topics, including migration from Iran (Fischer 2009b and its cover). More recently, I have also worked with the Brazilian film *Bacurau*, directed by Kleber Mendonça Filho and Juliano Dornelles, as a text about the US-Brazil dyad's use of "fifth generation hybrid warfare" (from disinformation to post-truth disruption of information in general), the COVID-19 pandemic, and authoritarianism, as much as about the transnational mix of cultural genres, technological projection, and mirrorings of deep social polarizations in the present day (Fischer 2021).

In all these essays, there has been an abiding ethnographic interest in *places and peoples*, a providing of *changing historical contexts*, and *artists' own discourses* and explanations. Art worlds can be key dialogic or conversation sites to present ethnographic evidence of cultural change, cultural contests, and immanent cultural critiques. Artists' ethnographies (they call it "research" or "field research") not only parallel those of anthropologists but should be objects of anthropological attention, not just an emic resource for etic theory. They can be colleagues who are good at presenting things in more adventurous, exploratory ways.

Future volumes of the project "Art and Emergent Twenty-First-Century Common Sense" are called *At the Pivot of East and West: Ethnographic, Literary, and Filmic Arts* (Fischer 2023), which will deal with women novelists and filmmakers renarrating male national histories otherwise; and tentatively *Risky Theater and the Ethnography of Life*, which will pick up the theme of the strategies of cultural critique in "illiberal" societies, or "liberalism disavowed" (as the sociologist Chua Beng Huat [2017] has put it), or digital and global circuitries in meritocracies, which are at play in the essays here as well.

1 Challenging Art as Cultural Systems

. . . to locate in the tenor of their setting the sources of their spell. — CLIFFORD GEERTZ, "ART AS A CULTURAL SYSTEM"

Dear Cliff,

In 1976 you wrote, "Art is notoriously hard to talk about. Even when made with words, it seems . . . to exist in a world of its own, beyond the reach of discourse. It is not only hard to talk about; it seems unnecessary to do so. It speaks, as we say, for itself. . . . But of course, hardly anyone . . . is silent" ([1976] 1983, 96). So begins "Art as a Cultural System," in the course of which you consider Abelam art (cosmic and ritual), Renaissance art (religious and calculative), and Arabic poetry (sparring and dialogic). The essay ends alluding to Ludwig Wittgenstein's notion that meaning arises in use, that what we need in discussing art is less cryptography and rather what you called a new diagnostics, "a science which can determine the meaning of things for the life that surrounds them . . . to locate in the tenor of their setting the sources of their spell" (120).

I want to pursue this thought and ask how meaning arises in artistic practices that attempt to grasp our emergent technological lives, often articulated in terms of scientific arts, or a curiosity about the world and joy in discovering that the world doesn't work the way we thought it did, and attuned to changing notions of common sense in different parts of the world. I want, moreover,

to do so centered in places like Singapore, Indonesia, or Thailand, where the categories of both anthropology and art criticism seem antiquated to describe what is going on, and where certain art practices seem to speak back against the simplicities of globalization, postcolonialism, neoliberalism, authoritarianism, and corruption and do so with a sophisticated cosmopolitanism both locally rooted and globally informed. The curator category "the contemporary" for art that comes after "the postmodern" is not very helpful here. It evacuates or at least dulls both the specificities—geographic, historical, and technological—and the internal contestations of critique, different framings, and alternative perspectives. Art markets and patronage structures exert political-economic pressures that many art practices in Singapore and Southeast Asia contest in a kind of para-site fashion, deploying what we used to call *immanent critique* or *critique from within*. Although much commentary on art in Singapore and Southeast Asia is still coded in twentieth-century terms of identity politics, obsessions with history, and liberal gestures toward multicultural dialogue, I wager that something new is being made evident in Asia, that there is a new form of synthetic realism, both openness to the technological future and critique of the transnational present, that is hard to find in Europe and the United States. This synthetic realism is made up partly of gritty survivorship of war (both World War II and the Cold War with its guerrilla insurgencies and rough security state responses) and partly of an ability to metabolize transnational circulations into local and regional gaming.[1] Gaming, artificial intelligence, bodily practices, and molecular and ecological sensibilities all contribute to a new Asian common sense for the twenty-first century. Singapore is an experimental space for the meritocratic world's thin membranes of control and out-of-control life. Art lies on the fault lines of culture, sometimes as sparkling gold, sometimes as water, ice, and gas that expand and crack the fault lines further open.

Singapore is of interest because it is so twenty-first century, so first world, and yet geographically afloat in the deep exchange circuits of Asia. It is, on the surface at least, hypermodern, testing all the newest technologies, from self-driving vehicles to blockchain fintech. I'm interested in what I will call light shows, shadow plays, and pressure points and will try my hand at a tactic you, Cliff, once called slideshows of lives and works. I've imposed three more questions or rules of writing on this experiment: first, can one compose an ethnography of a place, or global skein of networks (I am still my father's son, half geographer) using primarily a montage of artworks and the discourses of the artists, privileging the artists rather than constantly re-

ferring to Euro-American theorists? Second, can one do this with a balance of female and male voices and a balance of ethnic voices beyond the official plural society's four "races"? And third, can one write a piece on Singapore without personalizing it in the figure of Lee Kuan Yew, the longest-serving prime minister? What is the balance of immersion versus explanation that listeners/readers can absorb?

The fault lines I focus on here involve safe seas, gender relations, muscle and emotional memory in performance arts, civil-society activation, and smart-society biopolitics. The technological media range from high-end video and subliminal music to calligraphy in rattan and yoga to collective language learning and artists' networking.

I. PICTURE LANGUAGES AND MEANING IN THE AGES OF KINO EYE AND VIDEO

I begin with Charles Lim's fifteen-year-long construction of an artistic vocabulary with which to see the usually invisible infrastructures of Singapore as a growing, greening sea state, linked by fiber optic cables under the sea, by sand mining across Southeast Asia, and by digging down into the rock under the surface. Insofar as we are likely to become increasingly more, not less, dependent on living in, on, and under the sea, Lim's project is an ecological, biophysical, future-oriented one and thus also a critical anthropological one. His project, he says, is "a way . . . to force the issue. . . . Using Singapore as a laboratory . . . destroying Singapore as a national narrative, I'm actually breaking up [the national narrative]. You know Singapore doesn't really exist at all."[2]

"I devised a strategy for my work where instead of trying to come out with a position, like a political position, what I did was execute a gesture . . . through which these situations expand. . . . It's like an experiment." His work is not documentary (repeating what we have already seen), nor does it indulge in tropes of the alien sea (cold and sublime). The sea is warm, socialized, permit-ed and regulated, flowing around proclamations and buoys, and contributing its own culture or forms of knowledge, its own flourishing and modes of action. Lim compares his strategy to an inverted pyramid, building out from a minimalist gestural point, not unlike the ethnographer's frequent starting point in a vignette. In an important way, his work also aligns with recent historiographical efforts to reclaim sea-based histories from land-based and continental empire–framed ones. His camera eye

is often geometric, cutting the visual field with a razor's edge, immersed in the water or gliding evenly over it, silently surveying, observant, with only the sound of water as he capsizes or minimalist musical compositions, as in *Capsize* and *Cavern*, where two plasma screens face one another. In one he capsizes his sailboat, and the image follows his circular movement into the water and back up onto the righted boat, with the water sometimes above where the sky should be and the sky beneath (plate 27). In the facing screen, we go deep underground with similar geometry, down the huge circular elevator shaft into the whalelike oil storage galleries (plate 28). As the sound from one screen dies down, the sound from the other rises up, directing our gaze back and forth. Men carry the sailboat through the cavern in a noir premonition of living under the sea (plate 29).

Lim's fifteen-year project *SEA STATE*, which represented Singapore at the 2015 Venice Biennale, references mariners' nine levels of turbulence, from untroubled waters to typhoons. *SEA STATE 0: all lines flow out* exposes the infrastructure and fractures in the culture of the *longkangs*—Singapore's storm drainage system and placid greening canals—although, as Lim says in an interview, Singaporeans are proud of their drainage system because, unlike Jakarta and Bangkok, Singapore doesn't flood (or only a little so far). One backstory of *all lines flow out* is the escape from the old high-security prison at Whitley Detention Centre of the suspected Jemaah Islamiyah terrorist Mas Selamat through these drains, flushing him out to sea. Lim lightly alludes to this in a scene of a man being washed out to sea, but the film focuses on other themes—cleaning the drains and observing small life-forms in the water. There is a strong tendency to overread the political subtext in Lim's work: it's there, but politics in Singapore, as in Java and Thailand, does not work well when it is blunt; Lim's insistence on gestural strategy is an alternative politics of curiosity. In a later segment of *SEA STATE*, Lim maps the seafloor with sonar and turns it into an inverted 3D relief map of sand, bringing the undersea internet cables into view (plate 26).

In *SEA STATE 1*, or *Inside/Outside*, pictures of a hundred buoys are lined up on the wall in paired front and back views, looking out to sea and back to land, their shapes reminding me of seventeenth-century Acehnese marines lined up for battle with Portuguese intruders (plate 22). Buoys and lighthouses are beacons and warnings of rocks and shallows. They are *metastable figures* of offshore temporary autonomous zones: special economic zones, penal colonies, quarantine stations, military training zones, spaces of camouflage and commodity laundering, and industrial off-limits zones.

They project interior discontents and anxieties onto outside spaces: fortified islands, territorial water markers, beacons of safety, zones of exception.

Sajahat Buoy, or Evil Buoy (plate 23), off Sajahat (Evil) Island, both of which disappeared from navigational charts between 2000 and 2012, gives its name to *SEA STATE 2: As Evil Disappears and Safe Seas Appear*. The evil that disappears is not in the past but is what occurs in the present while we are distracted. Sand and land, even islands, disappear and reappear as reclaimed land. The enabling extralegal maneuvers occur out of sight, under national security imperatives, and subtly through contracting, permitting, and other camouflage. The key display in *SEA STATE 2* is a long "sandwich" of videoed strips of the coast turned ninety degrees, "placed side-to-side so that the strata of tropical blue sky, water, and white sandy horizons appear as abstract vertical strata" (plate 1).

The strips move up and down, as so many moving parts of the shore: port activities, container wharfs, boats dredging sand from the sea. Lim cut the video in half (plate 1). Half was water, and half was land; he cut the water half out. But as he says, the *land* that you see used to be *sea* (it is reclaimed *land*, sand from the *sea*); it remains under the Maritime and Port Authority, marked on navigation maps as still part of the sea until it gets consolidated and is transferred to the Land Authority *by proclamation* (see *Proclamations*, or *SEA STATE 9*, in chapter 4). The legal proclamations changing the status of sea and land are the magic of the state. In 1973 life and the sea became "radically de-socialized" when Singapore reactivated the old British Foreshore Act, making it possible for the government to seize the shorelines and begin the major land reclamations. Disappearing islands are, for Lim, part of a broader effort to put out of mind what happens at sea. Together with Takuji Kogo of the Candy Factory, Lim spoofs a 2011 naval recruitment ad, adding electronic music and a robotic voice singing the words of the ad, as the images spiral down like the nose of a missile (plate 2):

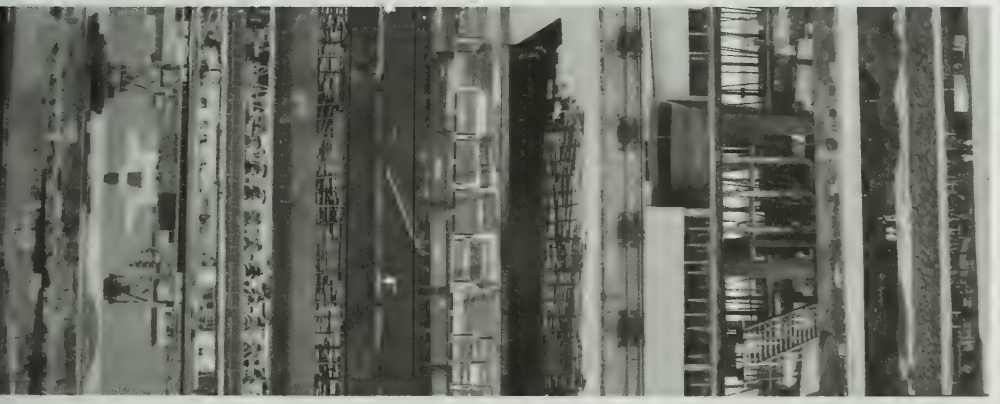
> We all take the sea for granted, but that would not be possible without the advanced naval technology that is deployed around our shores. Take the sophisticated Harpoon Missile. Smart weapons installed on the navy's missile Corvettes can destroy targets as far as ninety kilometers away. To avoid detection they travel at blistering speed just a few feet above the waves. They are deadly and they are dependable, but what is the best thing about these missiles? They make sure you don't even have to think about the sea.

Ever.
Life wouldn't be the same without safe seas.

I begin with Charles Lim for his inventive use of video, his attention to the transformation of the infrastructure (internet, canals, drilling of underground caverns, plans for building under the sea) opening to view the fault lines of the political economy of land reclamation and the national security state (think of what a similar project about the United States would look like).[3]

II. DEEP PLAY, SHADOW PLAY, AND GENDER IN THE AGE OF FILMIC RERUNS

Like the internet and safe seas, equally challenging to make visible are social infrastructures such as local women artists' networks as activators of civil society and feminist gender relations within the Intelligent Island and Smart Nation, two of Singapore's brandings, and deep play with reason and the irrational. Bringing gender relations out of the shadows is often feminist work, not only for gender roles, but for many other issues of identity, power, and social justice. I think here of Margaret Ai Hua Tan's *Smart Apron* (2005; see also Scott 2006) as a probe for thinking about wearable computing and mobile technologies, fitted with sensors that send SMS messages about falls or staying bent over too long, in order to make visible domestic work, es-



1.1 Charles Lim, *Sandwich*. Video and Diasec-mounted photo. Courtesy of Charles Lim.

pecially foreign domestic labor; also of Shirley Soh's work with female prisoners producing craft works about their lives and hopes, for display in art expositions, to show these women as relatives rather than abjected others; and recently of Sandi Tan's work in both the novel *The Black Isle* (2012a) and the film *Shirkers* (2018c), charting feminist fault lines and emotional structures in the obsessive retellings of Singapore's history.

As technological media, film plays with time, afterimages, and rapid shifts of directed attention, while the novel arose as a vehicle of double consciousness of being in two worlds at once with the imperative that individuals seek out specific information rather than rely on general communal common sense or traditional moral tales of how to live. Tan's novel and film probe the poetics of power, genre forms of storytelling, and the way hauntologies destabilize presumed ontological fixations (or false claims about the

1.2 Charles Lim, *Safe Seas*. Video screenshot by M. Fischer. Courtesy of Charles Lim.

fixed nature of reality, whether gender roles, official political histories, or neoliberal imperatives).

The film *Shirkers* (which won the 2018 Sundance award for best world cinema documentary directing) is about the failure to complete a film that Tan and two other girls, then in their late teens, attempted to make, under the influence of a film instructor, Georges Cardona, at the Substation, Singapore's independent artists' venue, founded in 1990 by Singapore's great bilingual playwright Kuo Pao Kun and his choreographer wife, Goh Lay Kuan. *Shirkers* was an improvised do-it-yourself film, in part about saving images of a Singapore fast disappearing through urban renewal, using a campy story line including shooting various characters with one's fingers (spoofing François Truffaut's *Shoot the Piano Player* [1960], among other film references). Cardona was supposed to edit it but never did, and the film disappeared, as did he, until twenty-five years later, when seventy canisters of the 16 mm film shots (in ten-minute segments) showed up. After years of embarrassed, disabling silence—not being able to talk about a film that had never been made, for which there was no proof that it had ever existed—Tan is enabled to make a new film with bits of the old and reexperience something of the girrl empowerment that she had felt during the making of the original film. The new film becomes a psychodrama about the ephemerality of Cardona, the guru or daemon, who cast a spell not only over the three girls but also over others he enticed into projects that never came to fruition. As Tan repeats over and over, she cannot bring herself to vilify Cardona. He is still the best storyteller she's ever met, and he turned her teenage film infatuation into a taste of empowerment through filmmaking and storytelling.[4]

Before the film canisters reappeared, to exorcise not just the loss of the earlier film but the devastating loss of a feeling of free agency, Tan began writing the novel *The Black Isle*, an art form not dependent on unreliable collaborators (Tan 2018b). She says, "My aim was to write a novel about an Asian woman who's neither driven by grievance nor defined by marital or filial relationships. I felt that those were the types of Asian heroines found too often in novels. . . . I wanted to give my heroine the freedom to be her own person, to be complicated in a modern kind of way—and then see where a woman like that might take a story" (talk at the Cambridge, Massachusetts, Brattle Theatre premiere, 2018, as well as in various interviews, 2018a, 2018b, 2018d). The novel, like the film, reconstructs a life, she says, "of a young woman with extraordinary powers who falls under the influence of a charismatic but sinister man" (2018a). But I read it as under the influ-

ence of *three* male figures, three different daemons or forms of *deep play* (Geertz 1972), with the protagonist herself becoming in the process such a daemon, too, one that traditionally might have been called, as is intimated in the novel, an angry female ghost or sorceress.

While narratively more complicated, the novel also has a first-person voice concerned that the past not be disappeared. The past, like the imagined future, is always with us in various forms that I'm calling shadow plays (but that local film and literature often evoke as sorcery, spirits, and ghosts) that flicker and fade, repeat, and sometimes resolve into immemorial images that can retraumatize, become further encrypted, or just become part of resilient maturity, like the bamboo or rattan that bends in the wind but does not break. Films and novels like Tan's are in part healing gestures for the wounds of our histories. In pursuing histories, we are always running *after the fact* (Geertz 1995), and the problems have only intensified in today's digital and controlled worlds: the libraries might decay, documents may be redacted, books trashed, and histories rewritten—so, as with the problem of transmitting nuclear contamination messages a thousand years into the future, we need to create flexible forms of cultural transmission that, like translational medicine or acupuncture, can administer the emotions, conflicts, and cultural resources of the past, so that repressions do not disable, repeat, or explode our capacities to understand our worlds.

Tan's film and especially her novel suggest that film songs and genres, not necessarily of the diegetic time period but as analytic probes, might be useful cross-temporal tools for *the interpretation of cultures* (Geertz 1973) that are themselves not of one time horizon or one locus of the imagination. "Very often, images come to me before words do," she says. "I wrote the book with several movie sound tracks on a loop, [significantly] including . . . *There Will Be Blood*, and . . . *The Talented Mr. Ripley*—and composed the whole thing as kind of a movie of my wildest dreams. . . . As if some fantasy amalgam of David Lynch, Alfonso Cuarón, and 1970s-era Francis Ford Coppola were directing *The Black Isle* in technicolor" (2012b).

The Black Isle continues the study of daemon or guru figures (I count Georges Cardona as the art daemon), whose passions are never exhausted and around whom the female protagonist must negotiate while protecting her sense of self. These include a Malay *bomoh* (master of the spirits) called by his Chinese employer by a generic Muslim name, oblivious to the cultural, not just the class, erasure; a Japanese commander who takes the protagonist as his trophy wife and cultural opponent through the hells of wartime

brutality; and the key politician of a cleansed meritocratic postwar Singapore. I call them the daemons of *autochthony*, of *warfare*, and of *rationality*; or one might call them tropical fevers: the *archive fever* and hauntology of spirituality located in old Malay thalassocracies; the *war fever* of tributary extraction, coprosperity spheres, and national security states; and the *meritocracy fever* of out-of-control rationality.

While these guru-daemons and fevers are male and patriarchal, the novel is constructed by its female author to imagine a woman protagonist—"unlike the heroines of most Asian novels." That, too, was the intention of the original film *Shirkers*, to do and create without barriers. It was a mood both of the times and of her stage in life. But with age comes experience, and it is significant that the novel's heroine changes her name from Ling to Cassandra. She also becomes a daemon in her own right, marginalized by history, not a *pontianak* (angry female ghost, usually avenging women who die in childbirth), but rather a once charismatic figure of female agency who works to outwit the historians and keepers of the archives and keep them from erasing her.

The World War II section of the novel is written à la *There Will Be Blood* (Anderson 2007) (a film about the landmen in the American West who swindled or threatened people into giving oil companies rights to drill under their land), governed not only by the extractive desires of that film but also by the noir, nightmare, and survivor genres of World War II in Asia, which foreground cosmopolitan gentility, veiling deadly games of sexual and political treachery, such as in Eileen Chang's novels of Shanghai (*Love in a Fallen City*, 1943, adapted to film by Ann Hui in 1984; *Lust/Caution*, 1979; adapted to film by Ang Lee in 2007). Horror and Japanese sexploitation films are also evoked. After such intensity, the novel's prose drops in emotional tension, aligned with the postwar return of the British and the now emptiness of their imperial assertion, bluster, and spectacle.

The final section of the novel is written à la *The Talented Mr. Ripley*—a film about a chameleon-like suave and expert player who steals the identity of a Princeton student, requiring cascading maneuvers—and is about the political struggle to transform Singapore under the charismatic daemon-guru figure Kenneth Kee, a near homonym of Lee Kuan Yew. Thinking of Kee through a film genre puts a memorable spin on his passion and legacy and frees this portion of the novel to be about the poetics of power. At one point, the teller of our tale, Cassandra, describes him as a man obsessed with Han Fei, the philosopher of statecraft who advocated for a leader who is so

still that he seems to dwell nowhere (like Geertz's [1980] description of the center of Negara, the Bali theater state), and thinks he would be kinder if he instead read Machiavelli.

The novel is one of many obsessive retellings of the history of Singapore in competition with the state. There is some effort by Malays and others to inscribe an older history than that told by the state, which insists on an Anglo-Chinese centrality, not even so much out of chauvinism (though there is that too), but out of a commitment to a certain kind of hypermodern work ethic.

Writing about subjectivity in the twenty-first century cannot be divorced from contested political histories. Or to say it another, more literary way, behind, or alongside, every ontology, a faddish word these days, or everyday ordinariness lies a hauntology. *Hantu* in Malay means "ghost" or "specter"; *haunter* in Old French, from German, means "home, one's haunt." A spirit or ghost haunts a house, or recurs persistently in consciousness. At times, when the return or repetition detects a difference, the *heimlich*, feeling at home, becomes the *unheimlich*, or uncanny. These emotional differences inhabit and create the sensing of ghosts, specters, or spirits and also help constitute subjectivity, the orienting immune system of the self, formed through relations with others. When the ghosts disappear, the self becomes disoriented, shadowless, insubstantial, without its parts, and pale, lacking the reflections of itself in others and thus unable to engage in the healthy interactions of living, drained of blood and thus of life.

This is the message of two of the sorcerers: the *bomoh*-Malay guru, the keeper of Malay repressed histories, lifestyles, and aspirations; and Cassandra, the keeper of alternative female perspectives, such as those being made visible by Margaret Tan, Shirley Soh, and other feminist artists in efforts to build collaborative civic action and human-scaled public art within the spaces of the Intelligent Island and Smart Nation.

III. PRIMORDIAL SENTIMENTS AND CIVIL POLITICS IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Singapore is still a plural society, created on layers of precolonial thalassocracies. Minorities in Singapore are generally grateful for the protections afforded by the secular public order—things were and are worse elsewhere—and with a sense of humor, one accepts the limited choices of official identity as Chinese, Indian, Malay, or other (CIMO). Theater and the arts provide opportunities to weave more identities and histories into the

cultural fabric. It is there, as well, that one can explore high-tech biopolitical futures, current meritocratic pressures, and identities that do not fit the fourfold CIMO, binary gender, or the pressure to identify Malay with Muslim.

The novel *Altered Straits* by Kevin Martens Zhi Qiang Wong (2017), for instance, reimagines Singapore's merlion mascot as a species of genetically engineered symbionts paired with elite human soldiers, forming Anthronaut incubators for human enhancements such as regeneration of limbs when injured, or the ability to hold one's breath underwater for long periods of time by using the myoglobin that sea mammals have. The battles they fight are fusions between the historical battles among thalassocracies of the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries and those of the future, in which alliance structures may look quite different from the geopolitics of today. The author is himself one of the category of Other, a Eurasian with a degree in linguistics and anthropology, and is engaged in a CoLang project to retrieve Kristang, the language of his Eurasian-Portuguese ancestors. CoLang is both an annual academic conference and a project that operates under the Linguistic Society of America, dedicated to teaching indigenous peoples, or speakers of creoles, whose languages are at risk of dying, how to collaboratively keep them alive. Wong teaches Kristang, although he did not grow up speaking it—the last in his family to speak it fluently were his great-grandparents. Most of the people in his classes have no necessary connection to the language other than that Kristang is part of Singapore's heritage. They have fun creating new words to keep the language alive—some inventions take, and others don't, just as in other natural languages. One might see at least a metaphorical resonance between the novel and his identity: he is, in a sense, a merlion, come by sea, defending the island.

Another recent novel is Daren Goh's biopolitical meditation, *The HDB Murders* (2019), a forensic inquiry into the psychological pressure points, and new subjectivities, of Singapore's meritocratic leadership, the academically best and brightest, recruited into the bureaucracy and governance of a smart nation, involving artificial intelligence, data mining, face recognition, sensors, and gaming as planning tools of "smart city" infrastructures. The ever more sophisticated data-mining, surveillance, and gaming system to manage governance is a computer or IT system with a name alluding to a drug that heightens concentration and visual acuity and reduces anxiety, helping to enforce the steady, unflappable, highly rational *affect* that is de rigueur for the administrative elite. Psychology as well as rationality is perversely manipulated through algorithmically calculated and managed biopolitical

equilibria for the good of the nation rather than its individual citizens. The word *meritocracy* comes from a famous 1954 book by Michael Young called *The Rise of the Meritocracy*, which satirized the British Labor Party plans for postwar England, which in turn were a key matrix for the philosophical foundations of modern Singapore. A character points out a value of Singapore for the larger global political economy: "As you know Singapore has the most liberal surveillance policy in the world. It lets us monitor anyone in the country without consequences. No questions asked. Mobile phones, emails, video calls, Google searches, text messages. Anything passing through the country's network. . . . Because of this, many countries . . . use us as an information hub. Through us, they can access all the activity that passes through the undersea fiber optic cables that run below us, which lets them run whatever clandestine operations they want. We're a search engine for everything that passes through us" (Wong 2019, 190). With this characterization, we are back to Charles Lim's undersea fiber optic cables, Margaret Tan's smart aprons, and Sandi Tan's daemons of modern life.

I end with two performance artists who probe deep histories, aiming to crack open and fracture the cultural fault lines of xenophobias, ethnic stratifications, and religious extremism. One, with dance and muscle memory, explores cultural styles of *person, time, and conduct* (Geertz 1966) as they evolve across the Indian Ocean and Malay Archipelago; the other, with music and the construction of rattan ghost ships, aims to teach parents to tell their children their own stories and histories rather than passively allowing all to fade into tall tales and official stories disseminated by the Tourist Board or National Heritage Board. Both provide *pressure points*, or acupuncture-like therapies for slowing down the world, creating consciousness and mindfulness of the bioecological and sociocultural worlds we inhabit and interact with, opening worlds of sensoria and renewal.

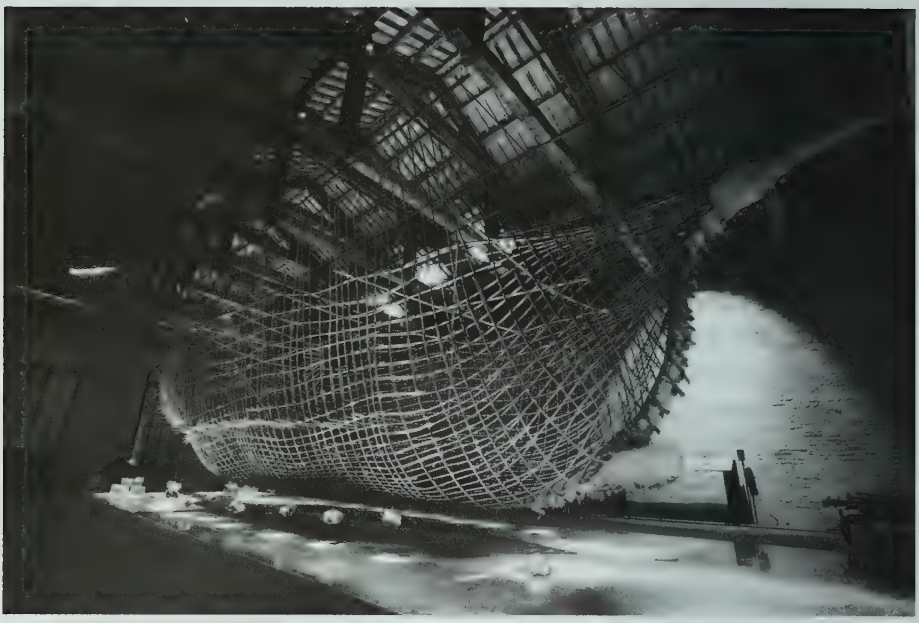
Singapore-born dancer, choreographer, and hatha-vinyasa yoga teacher Kiran Kumar, together with South Asianist anthropologist Saskia Kersenboom, in January 2017 traveled down the Kaveri River in Tamil Nadu, stopping at all the little village Shiva temples to seek out traces of ecstatic, tantric dance still surviving from before dance was codified into the so-called classical Bharatanatyam and Odissi, and then on to Surakarta in Java, where he apprenticed in the slower, more fluid Indonesian *alus* (genteel, refined) styles (versus *kasar*, unrefined as Geertz and many others have explored) of strength and grace. Kumar choreographs *durational sculptures* that fluidly and very, very slowly morph meditatively and narratively, requiring exqui-

sitely refined (*alus*) strength, while across a thin wall, sharing the music, videos loop visuals from his fieldwork journeys. These *Archipelago Archives* in dance and video provide therapeutic spaces apart from the high-tech worlds in relation to which they are lifelines and para-sites. They are parasites in being speculative and imaginary translational spaces between India and Indonesia and yet para-ethnographic in being rooted in teaching traditions and temple sites. They are para-sites as well as providing virtuoso examples for the self-work that has become part of high-tech society's anxiety and emotion therapies.

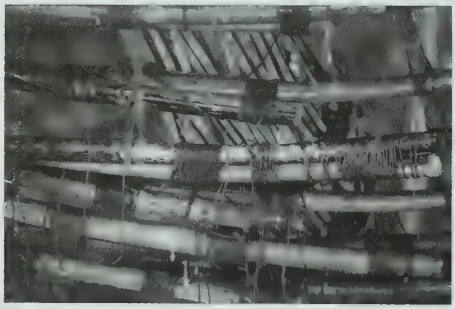
Similarly, Zai Kuning probes the acoustic as well as sailing traditions of the sea peoples of Southeast Asia. In May 2013 I went to an extraordinary evening he organized, of *ghazal* and *asli* music in the White House, a colonial wood building on Emily Hill, a venue arts groups could rent. The ensemble, called Ombak Hitam (Black Wave), consisted of his father (a well-known eighty-three-year-old wedding musician), Kuning himself (a well-known electronic and experimental music artist, performance artist, sculptor, and painter), and Tetsu Saitoh, a Japanese double bassist. Kuning would a few years later represent Singapore at the Venice Biennale 2017 with the largest of his ethereally floating Dapunta Hyang ghost ships, seventeen meters long, made of rattan, red string, and beeswax, representing Austronesian, Bugis, *orang asli*, and Sumatran sea voyagers and the knowledges that they carried (plates 3, 4, 5).

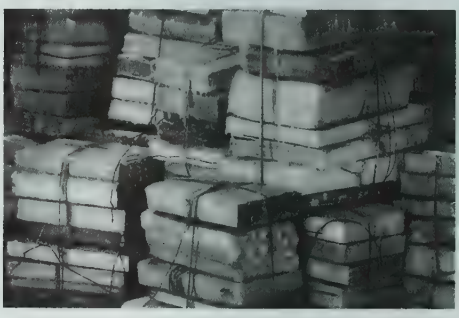
The name Ombak Hitam ("dark or black wave") in Japan refers to the Kuroshio Current that flows north in the Pacific (like the Gulf Stream in the Atlantic), and Saitoh uses it as a metaphor for how art and culture travel and mix across the globe. Kuning similarly invokes the seaways of Nusantara (a Sanskrit term meaning "between the islands," revived after World War II in the Malay independence movements for the archipelago that some have called the Malay Mediterranean). He explained to the audience, "*Ghazal* music has intricate melody, fluidity of movement and notes, the trills of the harmonium and violin whisper about days gone by; while *asli* indigenous music is percussion-based, mournful, as if pining for decades past. It is a very intimate sound, *quite close to talking*. We play *quietly, trying to talk to everybody*"—just as from across the waters one hears sound, even loud laughter and raucous play, muffled, quietly trying to talk to everybody.

The old wood White House, the reason I mention it, was itself an instrument. Its acoustics were more than acceptable, he said: "The bounce is not so bad as in new buildings, because the walls here are porous and the floor is



1.3 Zai Kuning, installation view, *Dapunta Hyang: Transmission of Knowledge*, Singapore Pavilion, Fifty-Seventh Venice Biennale, Italy, 2017 (solo presentation). Courtesy of Zai Kuning and Ota Fine Arts, Singapore, Tokyo, Shanghai.





1.4 (*left*) Zai Kuning, red string bindings of rattan ship *Dapunta Hyang*, Gillman Barracks, 2017. Photo: M. Fischer.

1.5 (*right*) Zai Kuning, beeswax-covered books carried on *Dapunta Hyang*, Gillman Barracks, 2017. Photo: M. Fischer.

thick timber. The materials are great for acoustic music as after a few beats there won't be any more ringing, just a solid clear sound." His father, the wedding-band musician, loved the microphone, but tonight they were not going to use microphones, because "traditional musics, like those played in churches and temples, deal with the acoustics of space and the resonance of sound. We [Ombak Hitam] search for pure sound, sound which is not amplified. It relies on the talent of the artist to control the sound which is not amplified. . . . An audience of sixty or seventy makes the sound quality better. The human body absorbs sound and lessens the echo."

Zai Kuning has been on a multiyear quest for *asli* music and *mak yong*, a folk opera form in the Riau Islands. The quest is part of his sense of guilt for his own paternal ethnic group, the Bugis, having pushed aside the original sea peoples, the *orang asli* or *orang laut*, but it is also, more important, a pedagogy to counter the forgetfulness of Malays, who increasingly conflate being Malay with being Muslim, and to counter the fundamentalism and intolerance that can grow on such erasures and singularizations. Recovering submerged histories is not easy, and his intuitions about this forgotten richness are supported by evidence that what we think of as Indian cultural transmission eastward may have been more bidirectional. Malayo-Melanesians were the more adventurous seafarers and might have gone west to bring back Sanskrit knowledge. Not only are the Indian dance poses (*karana*) portrayed on the Prambanan temple in Java two hundred years before they were carved on temples in South India, but the very form of Borobudur, a Buddhist site in Java, as well as the form of many Hindu temples in Indonesia and Thailand, is a fusion of Austronesian *punden* (rectangular tiered ancestor mounds to the *hyan*, or ancestors) and Indian cosmograms.

Zai Kuning's seventeen-meter-long ghost ship for Venice in 2017—like something hauled up from the seabed of Charles Lim's sonar mapping and visualizations of many shipwrecks along with the fiber optic cables—has wax-embalmed books all around, signifying that the ship is ready to go on a *siddha-yatra*, a voyage for blessings and spiritual power, not merely the assertion of secular sovereignty. The waxed covers of the books are engraved with the Buddhist graphic form that can be read as a lozenge, rhombus, boat, cupped hand, or vulva—signifying life's rebirths. Portraits of performers of the *mak yong* and *menora* dance-dramas of the *orang asli* (original people) and *orang laut* (sea people) watch from the Venice Arsenal walls. One even "speaks" via an audiotape. Zai Kuning's ships represent the seven royal peregrinations or naval circuits of his realm by Parameswara, the first Malay

king (not unlike the seven voyages from the other direction of the Chinese admiral Zheng He, several centuries later), but they are also part of Zai Kuning's quest to not lose the stories of the smaller sea peoples, the *orang asli* (original peoples), *orang laut* (sea peoples), and *orang* or *urak lavoi* (of the coast of Thailand), whom he thinks of as having been colonized, oppressed, and nearly exterminated by his own ethnic group, the Bugis, who sent out colonies from Sulawesi across Southeast Asia's islands and ports. The *orang laut* today are marginalized, extremely poor fisherfolk trying as best they can to live away from the grid, the money economy, and settlements, still mobile in their boats and stilt houses. But once they were warriors, loyal navies for the sultanates of the area, albeit called pirates by the Europeans. Protectors of the Johor and Riau sultans, they were able to mobilize tens of thousands of fighters on canoes from all over the islands.

In an earlier installation and performance titled *We Are Home and Everywhere*, Zai Kuning appeared as a warrior-king infused with spiritual potency, naked to the waist, a body of pure energy (*tapasya*). Lifted into the air with a knife between his teeth and another in his hand, he hovers over a scarred wood platform, in which two knives and a chopper are impaled. The wood platform merges into a polished steel surface. Slowly, the warrior-king lowers himself onto the mirroring steel surface. He ponders his reflected image. It is a striking image, perhaps, of Siddhartha seeing conflict, violence, and the ravages of old age, causing him to turn toward introspection, meditation, and nonviolence. Or, alternatively, it is an image of the Bugis warrior, and at times Kuning shows off his knife-throwing skills. While Kuning talks of the displacement of *orang laut* by Bugis, more generally he blames materialism and modernization for the destruction of feeling at home in the world. At times, he withdraws from urban life to a coastal village in Malaysia where he can reexperience the continuity of sea and land of his boyhood village along the south coast of Singapore, where one can just hop into a sampan and be at home anywhere in the sea and islands. At the far end of the installation, there is a small sampan boat suspended with pebbles hanging down pointing at books: the realm of knowledge transmission. Boat and book are metaphors for one another, the shape of one mimicking the engraving on the other.

Zai and his wife give workshops for children and parents, saying oral history or storytelling is not necessarily for the children; it is also for the parents to learn how to tell stories.

> You have to exercise [this skill]. When I worked with [Kuo] Kao Pun [the playwright and founder of the Substation, where Zai Kuning was the first artist in residence] . . . we talked about this a lot, about how we cannot depend on country history, family history, stories based on books, on what the government decides as history, we *have to create* a certain culture *from more storytelling*. The father did not use to read storybooks but t[old] stor[ies] about *my* background, about *my* grandfather. . . . Personal stories make memories, make the person, the individual, allowing them to become more imaginative, more connected to culture in thinking, so that when they look at something, they can imagine it even more than normal.

How to tell stories is an important mode of stimulating creativity, thinking outside the box of rules and regulations, and finding voice and purpose. "This is what happened to me" is quite different from having a folktale narrated on an iPad or in a coloring book. It is not just the story but the telling that is critical; meaning is in its use, and the *tenor of the setting* is crucial to the *source of the spell*.

CONCLUSION: ART AS ETHNOGRAPHIC PROBES IN A CHANGING WORLD

Dear Cliff,

In pluralizing your title from "Art as a Cultural System" to "Art as Cultural Systems," genres, scripts, and performance forms, and adding to the front the double-edged word *challenging*, I have attempted to turn art from the descriptive and ungrounded presuppositional (assuming we know what art is) into the experimental, the probe, and even the probative. This is becoming an ever more urgent task in a world of gathering authoritarianisms, corruption, intolerance, and technologies that are reducing the spaces for public moral reason. Both the arts and new modes of ethnography have important parts to play within old and new media. You, too, in "The World in Pieces" (Geertz 2000) challenged political theory as too quickly universalistic and judgmental, as I have been challenging philosophy in general and art history here more specifically.

I have drawn here on several minor arts in Singapore involving the prosthetic eye, double-conscious gender, and media play and producing talk-stories of reidentification and blocking deidentification by algorithmic

manipulation—in videos, novels, dance, and local musics—rather than the theater, the most obvious venue for cultural critique in Singapore, or thinking about how to counter the hegemonic magic rites of design and marketing, which recirculate words and images from popular patter back into branding and selling as modes of motivation and control. The community of Singapore artists, in conversation with their peers locally and elsewhere, attempts to keep alive the implications of the Intelligent Island of psychology and rationality.

What is needed today is a way to block the speed at which decisions are made in the hegemonic world of build-test-fail-iterate until something works at the right price point. This will take a multiscale rethinking of aesthetics in the world, one that allows for spaces for moral reason to slow down runaway technologies and that builds on these local human-scale tactics. Such are the social diagnostics, the tenor of the settings, and the sources of their spells for the 2020s.

Synthetic Realism

2

Postcinema in the Anthropocene

In animation, it is not a question of *composition* as in art history, but rather of *compositing*. Compositing is a way of thinking about the image in depth as layers.

. . . how to transfer these questions out of Southeast Asian studies into an art practice. . . . When we think about the problem of Southeast Asia, which is kind of historical, or, if we want, a postcolonial question, and take this question and splice it together with algorithmic systems, interesting things can happen.

The tiger is a horizontal, nonhierarchical, way of linking this region together. —HO TZU NYEN, TALK AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF SINGAPORE, 2018

What we are looking at are the layers of these proto-cinematic as well as postcinematic technologies layered together. We are seeing digital animation, live action, as well as shadow puppetry. —HO TZU NYEN, INTERVIEW AT THE CROW MUSEUM OF ASIAN ART, 2022

Two sets of exhibitions, one in Singapore and one in Korea, continue to lead me as a science studies scholar and as an ethnographer to reflect together with seven key artists on the role of technologies and gestures toward futures but also on the artists' ethnographic inquiries, including durational memories that may morph but do not dissipate and that challenge both techno-melancholia and techno-optimism.[1] The exhibition *Ghosts and Specters: Shadows of History* at the Nanyang Technical University's Center for Contemporary Art (NTU CCA) was held in 2017; the *Gathering*, an ex-

hibition of Park Chan-kyong's work, and Ayoung Kim's *Porosity Valley 2: Tricksters' Plot* (2019c) were shown at Seoul's Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in 2019, across the street from the Korea Folklore Museum, where I participated in a conference on the Anthropocene, a fortuitous but meaningful juxtaposition. All such museums, built and rebuilt with different uses, have layered histories, stretching back into colonial and precolonial times, and, of course, all such shows (and also conferences) have their entanglements with sponsors who attempt to negotiate national and international positioning, about which I will say a few words, but my primary interest is in the concept and image work of the artists, how they and others talk about these works as entries into emergent forms of life, the sensibilities they support or repress, and the changing common sense or naturalness they foster or undo.

I want to suggest that there is something new being made evident in the arts of Asia, which for the moment I will call a new form of *synthetic realism*, akin perhaps to *synthetic biology* and its artists.[2] This synthetic realism is open on the one hand to the technological future (Ho Tzu Nyen's algorithms, Choy Ka Fai's electrical mapping of muscle movements to retrain embodied memories, Hsu Chia-Wei's digital simulation in dialogue with physical ritual, Apichatpong Weerasethakul's gestures to light therapy and virtual reality). Simultaneously, this synthetic realism is open to critique of the transnational present. This synthetic realism is partly made up of gritty survivorship of war, both World War II and the Cold War with its guerrilla insurgencies and brutal security state responses (Apichatpong Weerasethakul's ghosts, Park Chan-kyong's gatherings after tragedy, Nguyen Trinh Thi's efforts to view ancient Cham in the shadow of nuclear plants). And it is partly made up of an ability to metabolize transnational cultural circulations into local and regional gaming.[3]

Gaming, artificial intelligence, bodily practices, and growing molecular and ecological knowledge all contribute to sensibilities that do not eschew, but rather recruit, shamanic wisdom, shape-shifting animal companions, and metamorphic hybrids (Ho Tzu Nyen's tigers, Hsu Chia-Wei's frog deity), along with attunement to the "movementality" of the earth (as Indonesian artist Entang Wiharso puts it, thinking especially of earthquakes and volcanic action; or extractivism and mining, as Korean artist Ayoung Kim posits), but also composed of transgressive visceralities, desires, and winds (the *kamaitachi*, which Choy Ka Fai reinterprets as interrogation in a police state).

In the last epigraph above, Ho Tzu Nyen speaks of the proto-cinematic and the postcinematic as layered together, and he gives as an example his efforts to summon the spirits in his theater performance *Ten Thousand Tigers* (2014).[4] "No one here calls the tiger by its proper name, unless in a whisper. For speech is spell, and words warp the weave of the worlds" (Ho, cited in You 2018, 233). In the other epigraphic comments (from an interview with Jacqueline Chao at the Crow Museum of Asian Art on January 20, 2022), he expands upon layering as a way of compositing different realities and worlds together to think how they might relate, resonate, or affect one another ecologically. The comment about the historical and postcolonial problem of Southeast Asia refers to his argument that the only time Southeast Asia was unified under one rule was under the Japanese occupation during World War II, which he characterizes as three years of brutality requiring a counter imaginary, and hence a return to the tiger, a shape-shifting metaphoric theme through much of his work, being both transhistorical imagery and transversal logic, coded often as weretiger. The English term *Southeast Asia*, of course, is also from World War II: the Southeast Asian Command for Allied Operations. Similar thoughts are in his interview in January 2020 with Kevin Chua, in which Chua tries to help thematize "realism" as a topic for a conference on "decentering realism."

These sensibilities in the works addressed in this chapter acknowledge gender and religious shadows: Nguyen Trinh Thi's "open shadows" and hidden ones (homosexuals who are out, those who are not) but also vernacular worship practices in the shadows of Buddhism or other hegemonic religions. These are flickering, destabilizing hauntologies posting back and forth among emergent forms of life. Not least are the shadows of nuclear technology, once beacons of free energy futures, now spurring radiation worries in the aftermaths of the Fukushima nuclear meltdown in Park Chan-kyong's *Belated Bosal* (2019) and the fear over the building of new nuclear plants in the Cham heartland of Vietnam in Nguyen Trinh Thi's *Letters from Panduranga* (2015).

Everywhere underground lie the dead, buried, and repressed, acknowledged locally, in nightmares and comas, as in Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Fireworks/Archives* (2016) and his masterwork, *Cemetery of Splendor* (2015), in which soldiers ill with deep sleeping sickness lie in a schoolhouse refurbished as a hospital. Tall poles of therapeutic green lights stand by their beds. This all rests on graves and the archaeological site of an ancient palace. Ghosts of the dead are celebrated in horror and ghost movies, stories,

and popular culture. But more deeply they point to durational memories that may morph but do not go away.[5]

EXPERIMENTAL TECHNOLOGY 1: *FIREWORKS/ARCHIVES*

Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Fireworks/Archives* (2016) is a koan or haiku, or a visual condensation of, or key to, not only *Cemetery of Splendor* (2015) but his artworks generally. He is an experimentalist, even a bit of a techno-mystic, fascinated by the idea that light and color therapy can actuate or morph memories in the brain (an idea he attributes to molecular experiments at MIT).[6] He is impatient to liberate film toward free-form 3D virtual reality, where one can look and move around as one does in dreams, not limited by the pointed camera and fixed screen. Dreams, he says, are better experiences than films, even his own. Virtual reality is still "awkward." And cinema is dying, being replaced by the digital ("*Uncle Boonmee* is one of the last pictures shot on film—now everybody shoots digital. It's my own little lamentation," he says of his 2010 film *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* [or his *jati* in Sanskrit-Thai, his prior caste or place in the social hierarchy rather than simply individualistic past lives, having to do with the illusions of the brain, emotion, and memories])(Kong 2010). His photographs experiment with these ideas: *Primates' Memories* freezes flashes of light, which then are digitally painted to create fictional topographies, color-coded like the yellow- and red-shirt political street conflicts in Thailand, where violence and revelry co-exist. Closer to *Fireworks/Archives* is the photograph *The Vapor of Melancholy*, showing Weerasethakul's partner in bed puffing out a cloud of smoke, surrounded by exploding fireworks, an image of an intoxicated dream or universe of transformed reality.

Fireworks/Archives was first projected onto a conceptual screen stretched across the world from the fantasy-filled Sala Keoku "garden of hell" temple and sculpture garden on the liminal Mekong border of Thailand-Laos to I. M. Pei's serene Everson Museum of modern art in Syracuse, New York, itself a striking sculpture of cubes hanging over a pool and fountain.[7] It was on the chiseled exterior wall of the latter that Weerasethakul projected his *Fireworks, Archives* in 2016, shortly after Thailand's military coup of 2014.

Sticks of fireworks explode into sparks, creating a circle of light. More fireworks burst into flames, against which silhouettes of concrete animals on their hind legs bray up at the light amid the fires of hell, miming the ghosts and monsters of wars both domestic and international. The actress

Jenjira Pongpas—from the film *Cemetery of Splendor*, being filmed at the same time—walks across the screen on her crutches. In white strobe light flashes, we see a statue holding a machine gun, and another caught in the act of killing with a machete. Banlop Lomnoi, who plays a soldier in *Cemetery of Splendor*, in jeans and a work shirt, walks amid potted plants in the shadowy temple grounds. The woman on crutches and the soldier from *Cemetery of Splendor* sit under a tree, like lovers, holding hands, his arm around her back. Another flash of white strobe light reveals them as two bleach-white concrete skeletons in the same position. They are lovers under a tree of life, in Buddhist imagery figuring the pain and suffering of cycles of earthly love and attachments, which, perhaps, can be broken by meditation on death, the transience of life, and the illusions of things. It is like one of a series, or a still from a film, or a precursor to filmstrip technology.

An old woman told Weerasethakul about green flares that used to be seen at night to help soldiers spot "communist farmers" hiding in the forest, signifying both fear of the authorities and pride in revolt when the villagers shot down a helicopter and sold its parts by the kilogram. The flames of *Fireworks/Archives* are also the annual burning of old rice fields to prepare for a new crop, the cycle of destruction and rebirth.

ETHNOGRAPHY 1: FEMININE SHADOWS AND CHAMPA

Ai nam ai nu or *bong ai cai* (feminine shadow) are Vietnamese terms for gay men referred to in Nguyen Trinh Thi's film title *Love Man, Love Woman* (2007), a portrait of Master Luu Ngoc Duc, a spirit medium in Hanoi's old city above the Handspan Travel office, also a teacher of the epic poem *Tale of Kieu* and "a living archive of culture and rituals" (says a shopkeeper who sells lacquered religious statues). Luu Ngoc Duc is a senior medium in the *Đạo Mẫu*, or Mother Goddess Worship (recognized by UNESCO as an intangible cultural heritage). The goddess reigns where three rivers meet, her worship is of the four realms (heaven, earth, mountains, and water), and she herself is a six-hundred-year-old reincarnation of Princess Lieu Hanh. Her *dong co*, or mediums, have the bodies of men but the spirits of women. They are flamboyant and colorful, with aides to help them dress; they revel in humorous repartee, elaborate altars, perfume, incense, sequins, and feathers. The shopkeeper observes that the Mother Goddess has been "taking cover in the shadow of Buddhism," that her worship functions as a "first threshold of nirvana," and that the Buddha's image, too, is neither male nor female but

"an asexual image of no anger, no yin nor yang, no separation, just neutral space," which, when balanced, and thus adding up to zero, has the ability to receive other worlds. Rites of initiation involve being possessed, and healing worship includes trance. The film provides access to the world of the young men who form Luu Ngoc Duc's entourage and also the world of women devotees and followers. But, above all, like Weerasethakul's meditations, it ends in a deep melancholy, a sensibility that what is on the surface is not all there is, and in an antifeminist moment, or rather a moment of an injured claim to power denied by the wider society, Luu Ngoc Duc says, "It seems like the gods and spirits look for male mediums to descend into because men are perceived to be 'cleaner' than women in every respect." When they dance, the mediums serve first the three goddesses (rivers), then the mandarins, and, third, the female spirits who mostly reside in the mountains. The dancers hold candles to light the way in the dark mountain forests.

In *Letters from Panduranga* (2015), Nguyen Trinh Thi draws back from working with an informant-colleague, from close-up (if always carefully cropped) portrait work, as in *Love Man, Love Woman*, to more distanced landscapes, questioning her own ethnographic gaze as unseemly majority-ethnicity invasiveness into minority lives. Like Luu Ngoc Duc, the Cham people, descendants of a powerful ancient Hinduized kingdom in south-central Vietnam, live in a parallel marginal world. Their history is barely mentioned in Vietnamese schoolbooks, and their land has been selected (as in environmental abjection sites, in so many areas of the world) for Vietnam's two future nuclear plants. Nguyen's *Letters from Panduranga* explores this double marginality (of the Cham and of the ethnographer-filmmaker) through a formalist indirection: she exchanges letters with a male ethnographer colleague who is exploring the Ho Chi Minh Trail. By writing letters about what they see, they think they can observe without disturbing the locals: "As artists, we have contradictory desires: to be engaged, but also to disappear." *Letters from Panduranga* draws on Chris Marker's *Letter from Siberia* (1957) and Alain Renais, Chris Marker, and Ghislain Cloquet's *Statues Also Die* (1953), but the female vision, as also in *Love Man, Love Woman*, is primary. She helps us see into both the past of Cham and a future that threatens yet more cultural erasure, if also one that promises electricity and easier living. Questions of fieldwork, ethnography, digging in archives, and colonialisms (French, American, Chinese, North Vietnamese, or Communist Party) are the foregrounded topos, but the letter-writing device—from alongside, if not entirely apart from, the flows of history—is urgent: What will the nu-

clear development plan bring to a province already buried by layers of more recent histories?

ETHNOGRAPHY 2, EXPERIMENTAL TECHNOLOGY 2: WIND THAT CUTS AND FUTURE BODIES

It is fascinating that *butoh* surrealist dance, shamanic interview, and folklore whirlwinds haunting rice fields (the *kamaitachi*), described as like both weasels and sickles, should lead to speculations about how to train muscle memory to produce dance movements, to allow for dance therapy, and to computationally hybridize famous dancers' styles and create an AI (artificial intelligence) choreographer.[8] Choy Ka Fai brings four years of ethnographic fieldwork with choreographers across Asia (eighty-eight artists in India, Japan, Indonesia, and China) together with ideas about mapping their movements and transmitting them directly into his own muscle memory through electronic impulses (more or less the way Luigi Galvani stimulated frogs' legs to move). He went to "interview" Hijikata Tatsumi (d. 1986) in his birth village in Tohoku (the region of the 2011 Fukushima earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear meltdown). Since Hijikata was dead, Choy had to do this through an *itako* (shaman), after which he used a 1973 film of Hijikata dancing (*A Summer Storm*) to map Hijikata's movements. With electronic pulses from the mapping, he tried to make his own body, and muscle memory, reperform the dance (*Eternal Summer Storm*; Choy 2010). In *Dance Clinic* (Choy 2018), he further proposes to analyze choreographers' brain waves and build an algorithm with which to create a "machine learning" (AI) choreographer. Thus, with electronics and brain waves, he proposes to transform Hijikata's choreographic language or *butoh-fu* (*fu* means "notation" or "word") into techno-animation of the body.

Using surrealist imagery, Hijikata had wanted to transmute the human body into animal forms and other states of being, as well as figures of death within the body.[9] Hijikata and photographer Eikoh Hosoe traveled to the north, to the places of their childhoods, to ethnographically investigate the mythical figures on the margins of Japanese life. The title of Hijikata's solo dance *Hijikata Tatsumi and Japanese People: Revolt of the Body* (1968) gives a sense also of his inspirations from, or dialogue with, the Roman emperor Elagabalus, who was known for possible transgenderism; Jean Genet, the Marquis de Sade, and the Comte de Lautréamont, all of whom were sexually scandalous; and the scandalous placement by Hijikata of the image of

Ba'al on top of a Roman temple as a nod to Elagabalus.[10] Hijikata explored the lines between acceptable and transgressive art, crossing back and forth across psychosocial boundaries. His first *butoh* dance, *Kinjiki* (1959), based on Yukio Mishima's ([1951] 1968) novel of the same title, created a public scandal for its sexually inflected violence. *Kinjiki* are colors forbidden to be used by certain ranks in society but is also a name for the marriage of a gay man with a young woman. There are parallels between the Hijikata's and Luu Ngoc Duc's efforts to find social space for sexually nonconforming males, between Hijikata's dance studio attracting male dancers and Luu Ngoc Duc's temple dancers and servants of the Mother Goddess.

Like Weerasethakul, Choy works experimentally with multiple media. He puts *Dance Clinic* onstage and does lecture-demonstrations of how he attaches electrodes on his arms, legs, and face. In passing, he notes that the male bodybuilders he first recruited to test the system were scared to allow a piano-like electric-impulse machine choreograph their movements in real time, but young female dancers found it quite amusing and intriguing. His demonstration lecture includes two series of historical slides, from before Luigi Galvani in the nineteenth century to the present, including artists like Stelarc, to illustrate, first, experiments with electricity in the animal and human body and, second, famous dancers' styles he wants to reproduce.[11] Like Nguyen Trinh Thi, Choy exposes his methods. He says he is not doing science but rather something in between popularization and science.

Choy, like both Weerasethakul and Nguyen, also rediscovers larger-scale forgotten histories, in his case that of the Lan Fang Republic of Hakka Chinese in West Borneo (1777–1884), but most of his work plumbs visceral and embodied movement, rather than historical or archaeological depths. *Dance Clinic* opens with a screen at the back of the stage on which is projected a raster (an array of equally sized cells) or vector graphics in motion, flexing like a wave and twisting, over which a formation of birds or fighter planes, wings spread, flies toward us—a sign of computational or AI ambitions. A dancer in red tights with a gigantic penis moves in front, perhaps a tribute to Hijikata's final dance performance in Dairakudakan's 1973 *Myth of the Phallus*.[12] A second figure holds a camera, part ethnographer-photographer, part videographer and animation aide. Choy enters and proclaims, "Imagine the future where dance is technology, where dance is made with artificial intelligence. Our mission is to empower choreographers with science and technology, to support creative processes, and for every dance patient that we meet the treatment has to be redesigned. . . . As dance doctor(s), we

live in the future, *we are so consumed by what we have not done yet*." Similarly, in *Prospectus for a Future Body* (2014b), Choy onstage declaims, "Can we design future memories for the body? And if that is possible, is the body itself the apparatus for remembering cultural processes? . . . What if I could take fifteen seconds of each choreographer [or dancer from his slide deck] and turn it into one dancer, so I call this a Gestalt muscle memory implant, which is totally not scientific at all. So you generate 3D data like Hollywood does a film. . . . You can have a traditional Thai dancer on the left [side of the] body and Merle Cunningham, an American dancer, on the right [side of the same] body."

EXPERIMENTAL ANIMISM 1 AND 2: FROG GOD AND WERETIGERS

Artists Ho Tzu Nyen and Hsu Chia-Wei were cocurators of the 2019 Asian Biennial in Taipei titled *Strangers from beyond the Mountain and the Sea*, which took its name from the famous classic of Chinese literature and folklore (translated with commentary by Richard Strassberg [2002]) and built further on the theme of "Ghosts and Specters: Shadows of History," one of the conceptual parts of the NTU CCA's exhibitions of the past five years (Bauer 2022). Hsu, in particular, is one of the inspirations for this chapter with his pair of installations on Marshal Tie-Jia, the frog deity, whose temple in the Wuyi Mountains of Jiansi was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution and who reinstalled himself in Jinsi Village on the Matsu Islands between Fujian and Taiwan, belonging to Taiwan. Of technological note is the doubleness of a ritual of divination in which the chair of the god shakes and hits the altar, a communication mode to reply to questions about community decisions. On the other side of a screen, his temple, chair, and ritual are translocated by motion capture and reconstruction on a 3D grid. It is, in a sense, two modalities side by side: one that attempts to recover grounding in history and one that relocates in a digital virtual space, a world of simulation, perhaps even (in the Baudrillardian sense) a future no longer requiring an original but itself becoming the reference model in a geometric reanimation. In two other pieces, about a Kuomintang soldier isolated by the end of World War II in a village on the Thai-Burma border, who became a Central Intelligence Agency officer during the Cold War and then a pastor at an orphanage, Hsu completes Weerasethakul's vision of a dying cinema and the birth of a new animism, saying, "I imagine my work as a stage distinct from the cuts and takes of a film." He puts onstage the orphans and other former

intelligence officers (all in impassive face masks) with a screen and a traditional picture tapestry used in storytelling. The pastor tells his life story to the seated orphan children, at a microphone facing the screen, on which dancers with stylized movements carry a Hanuman (or Monkey God) puppet in elaborate Thai costume. He tells his own story, interspersing it with the story of *Hanuman's Journey to the West* in search of medicines with which to save his army. Hsu says he wants the audience to be part of the stage action. And he wants the various modes of narration (autobiographical access to history, allegorical moral myth) to jostle and conflict. In this way, the children should understand that history is a fabric of multiple perspectives and moral claims.

Ho Tzu Nyen also promotes the use of 3D animation rather than video or even digital work (with its "need to generate every pixel" [Ho 2018b]). Among other virtues, 3D animation lacks gravity and allows transformations of metaphors into physical animal forms. He says,

> In early animation, animals are always transforming. Bodies stretch and their tails can elongate. And the other thing about early animation is the use of animal hybrids, like Mickey Mouse. So, the weretiger belongs in this genealogy of animation. If you think about the root word of animation, to animate, to move, anima in Greek philosophy to describe soul, animism, which is sort of the religion of these areas [of Southeast Asia]. (Ho 2018)

The mention of the weretiger is partly a reference to an iconic lithographic print *Road Surveying Interrupted in Singapore* (a tiger attacks the surveyor's theodolite).[13] Not only was road building an important tool for reducing the tiger's jungle habitat, and not only does the lithograph recall a "primal scene" of colonialism opening up the land for plantations, but even more potently, Ho suggests, "just at the moment when tigers are driven to near extinction, they leap into the imaginary of modernity; they become recurring ghosts binding the present to the colonial and precolonial past" (Ho 2018b). As such, they communicate with the world of ancestors and spirits. In his longer-term project under the umbrella term *Critical Dictionary of South-East Asia* (*CDOSEA*), *T* is for tiger and theodolite (animal-symbol and technology), *U* is for Utama (an earlier project on the multiple histories of Singapore), and *G* is for both Gene Hanrahan and the ghost of the famous and enigmatic triple agent Lai Teck during the communist insurgency in Malaya just after World War II (Ho 2012–, 2020a). Lai Teck is a subject of two

films by Ho: *The Name* (2015) composed of found footage about the mysteries of genius writers and a narration about Hanrahan, who disappeared leaving only his name, after writing an apparently well-informed history of the communist struggle in Malaya; and *The Nameless* (2014), about Lai Teck (one of some fifty aliases), composed again of clips from sixteen films, in which actor Tony Leung Chiu Wai plays traitors, informers, and spies. In the double-channel installation of the two films with voice-overs in two different languages, viewers see one set of images on one monitor, while being aware of a different set on the other monitor. Like double agents, stories are not to be taken at face value. The *CDOSEA* is intended as an online platform and an "algorithmically composed infinite film" (Ho 2018b, 2020a, 2021a)—a continuous stream of audiovisual material constantly updated by multiple and unknown authors (a cousin perhaps to Choy Ka Fai's AI choreographer).

In a more recent development of the *CDOSEA* in his 2019–20 residency at the NTU CCA's Gillman Barracks, where I visited him, Ho has turned to histories of popular revolts from both the left and the right with the help of virtual reality and game formats, incorporating legacy elements of film, video, performance, and installations. In his program leaflet, he says he is exploring ways of speculating about the relevance of these revolts and their issues as they will be seen from fifty years in the future, when "our existing epistemological frameworks will be drastically altered by accelerated technological transformations, geopolitical shifts, and ecological crises at the planetary level" (Ho 2020a; Franke 2017). Among the archive of images and writings he had pinned up on the walls to work from were passages from pre–World War II Japanese theorists, lists of popular revolts and dictators overthrown, a photograph of a circle of people in Gwangju after they had thrown out the army and tried to create a direct democracy, and Pablo Picasso's *Massacre in Korea* (1951), styled loosely on Francisco Goya's *The Third of May 1808* (1814).[14] On another wall he had maps of Southeast Asia, one with all the major earthquakes. It looked like a huge green snake from Sumatra through Java to New Guinea and up through the Philippines to Japan—a multispecies potential available epistemologically since the introduction of seismology and largely still conceptually available only through traumatic memories, in a bio-neuro-electro-mechanics not unlike those visualized in the paintings of Entang Wiharso (chapter 3 and cover image). These images and writings will be composed into layered artworks, "to weave together facts and myths to mobilize different understandings of Southeast Asia's history, politics, and belief systems" (Ho 2020a).

In fact, in recent video interviews in 2021 and 2022, Ho reflects on the development of his umbrella or metaproject (generative of many spin-off projects), the *CDOSEA*, from its original concept of producing a dictionary of fixed entries into a streaming of a never-ending, constantly recomposing flow of found footage, subtitles, and voice-overs. An algorithmic editing system does the recomposing. Animation is prominent but also 3D scanning and motion capture, as well as older technologies like shadow plays.[15] The only realistic way (he says in a keynote on *realism*) to evoke the multiplicity of, and temporal morphing of, the region of Southeast Asia—which has no unity in language, religion, or political form—is to produce *not a representation* (something fixed and thus dead) *but a dynamic model or simulation* that transforms itself. In an interview hosted at the Crow Museum of Asian Art in January 2022, he compared representation to the oil painter trying to paint clouds: by the time the paint has dried, the cloud has shifted shape or drifted away. One needs therefore a generating form that is never completed and that, like an operating system, is always updating.[16]

Ho's 2017 film and website project *One or Several Tigers*, for instance, is one of the more elaborate spin-offs of the *CDOSEA* entry "T is for tiger, T is for theodolite." Building on the lithographic print *Road Surveying Interrupted in Singapore* mentioned above, he has created a synchronized double-channel HD projection, with animation screen, ten-channel sound, and LED pulsated light behind the screen. The LED lights pulse in a rhythm selected by the same algorithmic editing system that selects the footage, introducing a pulse or beat activating the exhibition space and making the infrastructure of the exhibit less invisible. In several versions (in 2018 at the Hamburg Kunstverein, in 2022 at the Crow Museum), strips of LED lights are placed behind a front projection screen (the projector is mounted on the ceiling in front of the screen), and when the lights flash, they white-out the screen, turning it blank, a further comment perhaps on the erasures of history and the need to refresh. The tiger and surveyor are on facing monitors and sing a duet summing up their perspectives of a million years of coastal occupation between sea and forest, favored and contested by both tigers and humans. Tigers were there first from a million years ago, when Southeast Asia was a single landmass (the Sunda Shelf). When the seas rose, the land separated, and the tigers evolved subspecies. All across Southeast Asia, there are myths that tigers are ancestors of humans or carry the spirit of ancestors. He uses song, Ho says, because, being of Chinese ethnicity, he is not fully at home in English (the working language of Singapore), yet also not

at home in Mandarin (the other state-supported language), and his discomforts are overcome in singing, which serves at the same time as a metaphor for the discomfort of both tigers and humans in their sharing of the liminal area between sea and forest. Further figuring this discomfort is the fact that human viewers have to choose which monitor to watch, not being able to see both at the same time.

> The work consists primarily of [George Drumgoole] Coleman and the tiger facing each other and singing this duet, they cast shadows on each other, the human spectator just happens to be in the middle of the space, we can think of them as spectators who have just wandered into this *ritualistic exchange* between the tiger and Coleman. On the other hand, sometimes I think it could also mean that depending on the direction that the audience is facing the audience at that moment *becomes* either the tiger or Coleman. (Ho 2018)

At the meta level, Ho (2018) notes, "What we are looking at are the layers of these proto-cinematic as well as postcinematic technologies layered together. We are seeing digital animation, live action, as well as shadow puppetry" (Ho 2021a).[17] The ideal audience for this work, he says, is "not really a human *anymore*" because a human can only see it partially from one side. So, he jokes, maybe the work is actually made for spirits, gods, and possibly aliens, "which are beings that have vision which is 360 degrees" (Ho 2021a). In this, one is reminded perhaps of Chinese opera, in which rituals are performed for the gods, not humans.

More important is that, wanting "to escape the binary struggle between tiger and surveyor" (Ho 2021a), Ho looked to the surveyor's entourage, the prisoner-convict laborers for public works imported by the British from southern India. While the tiger and surveyor are pure digital creations "with no indexical trace of an original reference" (Ho 2021a), the Indian prisoner-convict laborers are actual migrant laborers today, whom Ho has hired as actors, putting them in a 3D scanner with "180 cameras coming to life with a synchronized flash in a moment of capture" (Ho 2021a). The film shows the mechanism of the scanning and the whiteout at the moment of the flash. Ho reflects, "This was, I would say, a very violent, almost violent mode of capture of these subjects" (Ho 2021a). The results are extraordinarily vivid as the 3D images are manipulated into much more dynamic positions than in the lithograph. Ho takes his eight actors to the National Gallery Singapore, where the lithograph hangs on the wall. They discuss the continuity of the

nineteenth-century migrant labor force with the 300,000 migrant laborers in Singapore today.

The dynamism of this project has unfolded and expanded over time, most recently during the COVID-19 pandemic of 2019–22, when longtime migrant laborer and Bangladeshi poet Ripon Chowdhury and Ho made a single-channel video that was four minutes, twenty-seven seconds long called *Waiting* (Ho 2020b), originally commissioned for the Edel Assanti Gallery in London. It is one long shot that Chowdhury films from inside his barracks where migrants are quarantined, moving along rows of metal bed frames to the single window. Forty-two screenshots or stills are aligned with the forty lines of a poem by Chowdhury. Made with a handheld camera, the film reveals the tremors of the hand (of the nervous system, Ho stipulates), and the window is the only interface from the overcrowded inside to the ironically empty outside. The commission was originally to Ho, but Ho astutely decided that the perspective of a migrant would be much more important.

ETHNOGRAPHIC ADVOCACY 1: ANYANG, PARADISE CITY, MANSHIN, BELATED BOSAL

I want to close with a few notes on some of the work of Park Chan-kyong and a younger Korean artist, Ayoung Kim, who had simultaneous shows in Seoul's Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art (MMCA) in December 2019 and who more strongly bring the technological and ethnographic themes together with those of the Anthropocene, or perhaps, to use a slightly different labeling: hauntology, habitability, and postmodern futures. Park, echoing Theodor Adorno, asks:

> What art language can be possible after disasters like the Fukushima tsunami or Sewol Ferry disaster? . . . [T]he purpose and functions of religion and art, at least, are to defend certain (or groundless) hopes themselves *within* the circle of the "evil world," either real or virtual, and this is distinct from the law and politics that only establish the measure of justice *outside* the evil world. Art, in some sense, seems to echo that paradoxical structure. For this I use the diverse lexicon of paradoxes and ironies, including the redemption through mechanical instruments (*Belated Bosal*), the ritual that turns out to be comical (*Belated Bosal*, *Gathering*), the sublime within the naive faith in our blessings (*Gathering*, *Folding*

Screen), and the natural beauty transcending disaster (*Fukushima, Autoradiography, Water Mark*).[18]

Park's docu-fiction *Anyang Paradise* (2010), also featured in the NTU CCA exhibition, explores the story of the Green Hill Textile Mill fire of 1988 that killed twenty female sweatshop workers, locked in the building, who could not escape. Ironically, this disaster happened during the height of the labor movement in South Korea and the year of the Summer Olympics in Seoul. Park's film, with its satirical title that points to both the Stalinist paradise of North Korea and the exploitative capitalist paradise of South Korea, reflects on the ambivalent legacies of heritage, including a traditional woman's dance about their troubles with men (made marketable for tourists with a UNESCO intangible cultural heritage designation) and an excavation of the ancient Silla dynasty Jungcho temple, buried under a later temple (a token of forgotten histories undervalued today except in tourism). Though the film, which is composed of eight stories, involved local citizens as actors along with professionals and was shot in the city as part of the Anyang Public Art Project, Park sees himself as caught between an older tradition of anti-elite people's art (*min-jung*) and the market and political uses of post-*min-jung* developments, neither sufficiently self-critical nor able to aid recovery after tragedy and trauma.[19]

This concern with recovery from tragedy would be expanded on in his films *Manshin: Ten Thousand Spirits* (2013), about the life of Kim Keum-wha, South Korea's most famous shaman, who was later called on to help the nation grieve and heal after the *MV Sewol* ferry disaster on April 16, 2014, and again in the stunning *Belated Bosal* (2019), a response to the March 11, 2011, Fukushima Daiichi nuclear meltdown and radiation release in Japan. In *Manshin: Ten Thousand Spirits*, the shaman tells her own life story, which coincides with the division between North and South Korea, including her increasing fame as a healer for national and personal traumas. She was shunned as a child for being possessed by spirits (but then became a shaman, carrying on her grandmother's tradition) and as an adult for being superstitious, but after moving from north to south and healing soldiers in the area of the demilitarized zone between North and South Korea, her fame increased as a healer not just for individual, personal, or family traumas but for national ones. Eventually recognized as a national asset, she was called on to help the country grieve and heal after the *Sewol* ferry disaster in 2014. The ferry, en route from Incheon to the island of Jeju, capsized, drowning

250 students on a trip, and more than fifty others. The film retrieves black-and-white footage of World War II and the division of the Koreas, as well as of the shaman's own increasingly colorful life. Jeju is an island of complex conflicts to which we will return in Ethnographic Advocacy 2.

Belated Bosal, a response to the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear meltdown and radiation release, in its quiet way, is a profound advocacy statement about the Anthropocene, environmental degradation, and reminders of the hubris of techno-optimism (resonating here with Nguyen Trinh Thi's film, above, worrying about the Cham area of Vietnam). In a dark photonegative film, two women in hazard suits comb through the irradiated forest with dosimeters and Geiger counters, find an abandoned temple, and, at a site selected by a woman shaman, restage a funeral pyre for the Buddha. The film is doubly a restaging and animation of the classic images (paintings, murals) of the Buddha's funeral and a technological staging of bringing a metal shipping container on a ship and using cranes to lift it onto a flatbed truck for transport through the forest to a site selected by the female shaman. The container is painted with flames on the outside, and inside a coffin bearing the Buddha is placed. The Buddha's feet stick out of one end of the coffin, suggesting the Buddha cannot be contained. The container is set alight and floats away. The moral or allegorical point is that of belated Bosal, the disciple who arrived late to the event but is assured it is never too late, since the point is the gathering of the survivors to live on. This, too, is the point of a *Gathering* in the museum.

That is, the *Gathering* also emphasizes the changing role of the museum, which, like the NTU CCA, has become a dynamic space for bringing people together to debate the "ironies and paradoxes" presented in artworks, rather than a passive space for hanging and admiring pictures. Like the artists represented in the NTU CCA's *Ghosts and Specters: Shadows of History*, there is a foundational layer of ethnographic inquiry of going to places and of calling up half-forgotten, buried, or built-over histories that continue to inhabit the subconscious and unconscious of the present, sometimes accessed through old and new shamanic rites (as in Choy Ka Fai's "interview" with Hijikata Tatsumi and Nguyen Trinh Thi's portrait of Luu Ngoc Duc). This is instantiated both in the artworks themselves and in the museum location (and in one of Park's artworks in the show, which is a miniature of the building itself as a kind of mise en abyme): the Seoul MMCA stands on the layered grounds and reused buildings of what once was the former Joseon dynasty's Office of Royal Genealogy; then, under the Japanese occupation, it became

the annex of the Kyungsung Medical School hospital; and after World War II, it became the Defense Security Command.

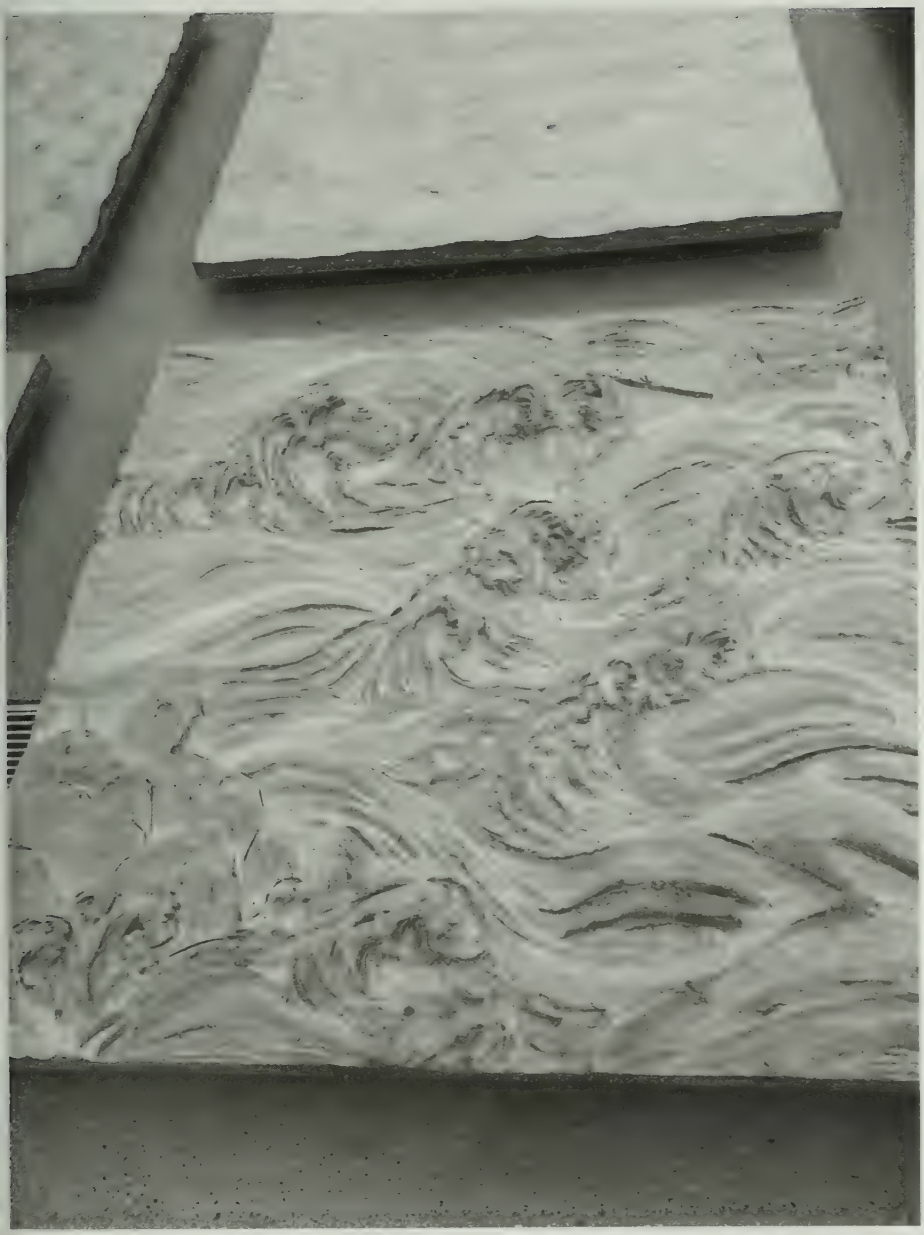
Across the street from the MMCA is the Korea Folk Art Museum, where in December 2019 the first International Conference on Anthropocene Studies was held; ironically, it was in a modern building topped by a tall pagoda with a grand staircase and two shorter pagodas, all patterned after earlier temples. It contains ethnographic artifacts of traditional Korean life. The grounds contain striking village guardian figures in stone and wood. There are rental services for the popular Korean cosplay of dressing up in colorful Josan garb. This museum, one might say, is a somewhat ungrounded or dissociated afterlife site, in contrast to both the MMCA and the adjacent repeatedly ruined and reconstructed Gyeongbokung Palace.

Destroyed in 1592 by a Japanese invasion and left derelict for 273 years, the palace was rebuilt in 1867, then destroyed again under the Japanese occupation in the early twentieth century. The Japanese assertively built East Asia's largest government building (the General Government Building) to block the view from central Seoul of the cosmological setting of the palace ruins with the mountains behind. This stolid concrete European neoclassical-style building stood there from 1926 to 1996, partly a statement of modernity, with one of Japan's first elevators and a copper cupola. After World War II, from 1945 to 1950, it continued to serve as the seat of the National Assembly and of the government of South Korea. Heavily damaged in the Korean War, it was again left derelict as a ruin of remembrance, until it was rebuilt in 1962 by President Park Chung-hee. It was functional and modern, if also symbolically disturbing to Korean identity and sovereignty. Only in 1996 did Park finally have it demolished, and the Haechi guardian statue of the Joseon dynasty (a composite mythic lion and sea mammal) was restored at the entry gate to the palace. The cosmological view was restored up to the mountains behind in their proper feng shui relationship to the north. Park further affixed a Confucian slogan on the Gwanghwamoon (entry gate) and on each of the palace buildings.

Buddhism had been sidelined, most of its temples banished up into the mountains, by the Joseon dynasty, which instead elevated Confucianism, distributed and broadened landownership, and established a mandarin-style governance and an expanded base of a gentry. Yet, despite being marginalized under the Joseon, *Buddhism (and shamanism) remain to this day strong as a visual culture in thinking about the afterlife of the Anthropocene.* One Buddhist temple (of the three that were allowed to stay in the city) remains adjacent to the palace and the MMCA.

Park Chan-kyong's *Gatherings* is, in part, focused around the disasters of March 2011 in Japan's Fukushima Prefecture (the earthquake, tsunami, nuclear meltdown and radiation release, rumors and fantasies, distrust of authority, and precarity). It is also partly a retrospective of his artworks and includes works he takes from earlier contexts and rearranges into new narratives. It includes a series of digital photos taken from (mostly newly built) temple walls, in vibrant colors, of animals crying over the departure of the Buddha. A wall panel notes the double meaning of *flamboyant* as comic style and as flames that carry the Buddha away, with burning deep existential sadness. A piece nearby is *Water Mark*, a set of sixteen concrete floor panels that model different styles of representing the sea in traditional paintings and decorative art, alluding to the *Sewol* ferry disaster and to the Buddhist notion of a watermark, which, written in Chinese with two characters, puns on *hae-in*, "sea" + "seal." *Hae-in* is the paradox that everything in the world is in constant change and flow, is revealed in clear seawater, and is captured or revealed as if "sealed" under the fluid water. A wall panel suggests, "The ineffective attempt to represent flowing water on heavy thick cement panels is a metaphor of our helplessness in the face of present-day disasters." The concrete panels of swirls and waves form a kind of Zen garden around which talks and discussions in the museum are held (figure 2.1). A video of the construction of the MMCA acknowledges the death of four workers in a fire and the performance of a *gut* (shamanistic ritual) to console the spirits of the dead.

A twenty-five-minute slideshow called *Fukushima, Autoradiography* (2019), in collaboration with photographer Masamichi Kagaya's photographs and botanist Satashi Mori's autoradiographic images of organisms and objects, alternates the black-and-white "radiograph" images with photographs of small-town peaceful scenery in the "no-return zone." Park (on a wall panel) calls it a "deadlock between images and textual information," or, we might say, between what is visible to the bodily senses versus what is made visible only through scientific instruments, such as a Geiger counter or a germanium counter for radiation in food. The ordinary photographs fail to make the radioactivity visible, while the black-and-white X-ray-like images, Park says, exhibit a "non-presentness." A fourteen-minute photo slideshow, called *Sets*, plays with another deserted city across divisions of reality. It arranges photographs of the Joseon Film Studio in North Korea, a film set of the Joint Security Area, and the Military Street Fighting Training Camp in South Korea built to look like North Korean territory, each mirroring the other.



2.1 Waves in concrete. A panel in Park Chan-kyong's *Water Mark*, 2019, cement, 5 × 110 × 110 cm (15), 20 × 110 × 110 cm (1). Installation view at MMCA Hyundai Motor Series 2019, Seoul. Photo: M. Fischer.

But the central piece of the installation is the film *Belated Bosal* (2019, 55 minutes), with four-channel sound, entirely composed in photonegative black and white, the white indicating radiation. It is an expansion of the theme of the slideshow. There is no dialogue or voice-over, but there are captions in Korean and English. A close reading of the film reveals a density of Buddhist allusions for those interested in getting beneath the surface of the film. For the casual viewer, the surface of the film is, by itself, quite mesmerizing, if occasionally mysterious. Hence the rewards of the investigative reading, of treating the film as a forensic exploration.

The film begins with radiographic images of a bat and a moth (tokens of metamorphosis). They are oddly identified in an intertitle as "Immortal Bird" and in an English caption in the film with the Egyptian mythic bird, the phoenix ("Immortal Bird"). All are symbols of rebirth and metamorphosis. But those general symbolic references are made sharply pointed and explicit with an image of France's oldest fast breeder reactor, the Superphenix. The captioning in the film informs us that the half-life of radium 226 is 1,600 years, or 3,000 years for high-level nuclear waste. After this prelude the film opens with a colorful Buddhist mural of the sangha (monks) surrounding the reclining, red-robed Buddha, his head resting on his right hand, as he leaves his body for a deathless state and extends his two bare feet toward his disciple, Bosal, who arrived too late and is pictured with a sad face below (figure 2.2). In the sky carried on clouds are a sheathed kris, or short sword; the upright palm (mudra of peace); and a pipa (a pear-shaped Chinese lute). In the upper left corner, the coffin of the Buddha is shown being borne away by flames in the sky. This classic mural of the death or transcendence of the Buddha, for me, resonates with my account of Takashi Murakami's oversized mural *The 500 Arahats*, which premiered in Doha, Qatar, in 2012 and which I viewed at the Mori Museum in Tokyo in 2016. It also reworks older classic images, and responses to disaster, in another scene of the gathered disciples of the Buddha left behind (Fischer 2018c).

As the film narrative unfolds, we first follow Gahye, a young woman dressed in hazard gear, holding a Geiger counter, who explores the "autoradiographic" black-and-white forest (figure 2.3). She measures radiation here and there, scraping the bark from a tree and putting samples in a pouch. Gradually, other characters join the narrative, which eventually doubles back to the Buddha's death scene and the story of his disciple Bosal arriving late.

But first we see a container ship coming to shore, and a container is placed on a truck, which makes its way through the forest up a dirt road. Meanwhile,

2.2 Traditional mural of the Buddha's bier and coffin ascending. Park Chan-kyong, *Belated Bosal*, 2019, HD film, black & white, 5.1-channel sound, 55 min. Installation view at MMCA Hyundai Motor Series 2019, Seoul. Photo: M. Fischer.

an older woman (apparently named for, or a medium for, Bosal) climbs the mountain; rakes a small plot in the forest, as monks do in Zen temples; and clears and marks a rectangular space in white. Two young artists prepare objects and paintings for the funeral pyre: one paints the leg of a statue with black pitch and later takes the hardened pitch off the mold. The statue, a wall panel suggests, is a figure of artificial and ineffective saviors that we build for ourselves, as is the mechanical musical instrument that is placed in the casket (it is displayed in the museum space surrounded by the paintings of crying animals). The other young man paints a Buddhist mural with a series of Korean-style high-peaked mountains (figure 2.4). A tourist magazine poster in the film informs us that these "Diamond Mountains, or Geungang, are perhaps the most famous and emotionally resonant mountains on the Korean Peninsula." That poster is for an exhibit titled *Travel and Nostalgia in Korean Art*, and the poster's text tells us that "the show explores how Jeong Seon, 1676–1759, revolutionized Korean painting with his Diamond Mountain landscapes, replacing conventional generic imagery with specific detail, and influencing generations of artists. The potency of these mountains is an emblem of Korean cultural identity, reflected also in Korean literature. It is a range of rocky peaks, waterfalls, lagoons, dotted with pavilions, that inspired centuries of creative work." The sculptor uses a string saw to

2.3 Testing the forest for radiation in hazard gear. Park Chan-kyong, *Belated Bosal*, 2019, HD film, black & white, 5.1-channel sound, 55 min. Installation view at MMCA Hyundai Motor Series 2019, Seoul. Photo: M. Fischer.

2.4 Painting the Diamond Mountains for the mural inside the funeral container. Park Chan-kyong, *Belated Bosal*, 2019, HD film, black & white, 5.1-channel sound, 55 min. Installation view at MMCA Hyundai Motor Series 2019, Seoul. Photo: M. Fischer.

cut and shape a black Styrofoam block into a philosopher's stone, and as the caption tells us, "The holes, creases and abrasions from years of weathering [of such rocks] are the immobile clock of nature."

A second young woman sports aviator glasses, which provide the filmmaker with several mirror or double-scene opportunities to show one scene on the glasses while another is showing in wide angle. She comes upon a series of cairns, rock piles (like Mongolian *evoos*; see below), from which one can hear the ghosts and ancestors moaning and crying. One of these cairns has become a shrine with currency bills stuck into gaps between the rocks. Similarly, Gahye comes upon a memorial for the January 12 incident of 1968 and the fifteen-day trial of thirty-one armed North Korean commandos who crossed into the South in a failed attempt to assassinate South Korean president Park Chung-hee in the Blue House. Suddenly, a man holding a gun drawn jumps out from behind a rock. After a moment's shock, Gahye (and we) sees it is a statue, with two other rifle-armed soldiers behind him. After this scare, and the labored breathing in her helmeted hazmat suit, she climbs up to a concrete shelter and, exhausted, lies down to sleep, only to have a scene of her as an X-ray skeleton flash by.

Meanwhile, the old lady Bosal prepares the rectangle in the forest where the container will be placed. Having cleared and raked it and marked its borders, she performs a beautiful slow dance with her shawl. The flatbed truck with the container arrives, and a crane lifts and sets the container down with precision on her rectangle. Gahye sees or dreams a set of buildings on a hill, like a painting. She approaches and comes to a temple in which a large wooden carp is hanging from the ceiling. She measures the radiation here too.

The parable is that once there was a Buddhist priest near Dongling Lake in China who turned a frivolous disciple into a fish and threw him into the lake. The disciple frolicked even more joyfully in the water. Annoyed, the priest punished him by planting a tree on his back. Eventually the priest turned him back into a human, but to serve as a reminder, he turned the tree into a wooden carp, and the leftover wood into percussion instruments. Gahye stands in front of the elaborate temple altar (figure 2.5). A caption tells us that Gahye beholds her past life in the temple on the mountain.

Suddenly her arm is cut off, and it spews black liquid. She catches the detached arm and carries it. It is either she (right hand holding a sword, severed left arm still spewing black liquid) or a monk (it may be her head, but the robes are those of a monk), and she is then seen facing a grandfather-like figure with a wood-mask face, a white top, and a flowing skirt. It is, a

caption tells us, Manjushri, a bodhisattva associated with *prajna* (insight) and thus a figure of wisdom. He is often portrayed with a flaming sword, and so perhaps the scene is one of his transference of insight to Gahye. But the sword and the gushing black liquid might also be a darker reference, like the Superphenix above. Two nuclear reactors in Japan's Fukui Prefecture were given names of bodhisattvas: Monju (or Manjushri in Sanskrit) and Fugen. Fugen is the deity of truth and wisdom (Fugen Bosatu, Samantabhrada). Use power wisely, perhaps: traditionally, Monju also holds a *vajra*, a symbol of tantric power. Another traditional image then shows us the Buddha holding a sword while a panther crouches on a nearby hill.

A series of quick symbols pass by while the container is lifted off its flatbed truck by a mechanical crane: a boat in the water (crossing over the turbulence of life?), ripples in the water (reminding us of the sixteen cement captures of traditional forms of waves), and some modern windmills (providing alternative energy to nuclear power plants?). Gahye climbs into the casket to try it for size (figure 2.7). She looks down: the bottom wood grain is a pattern like the waves and eddies of the sea. The casket is too short: she removes her breathing helmet, and still her feet push out the bottom of the casket. The film reminds us again about nuclear power; India's first successful nuclear test was performed on the Buddha's birthday, May 18, 1974.

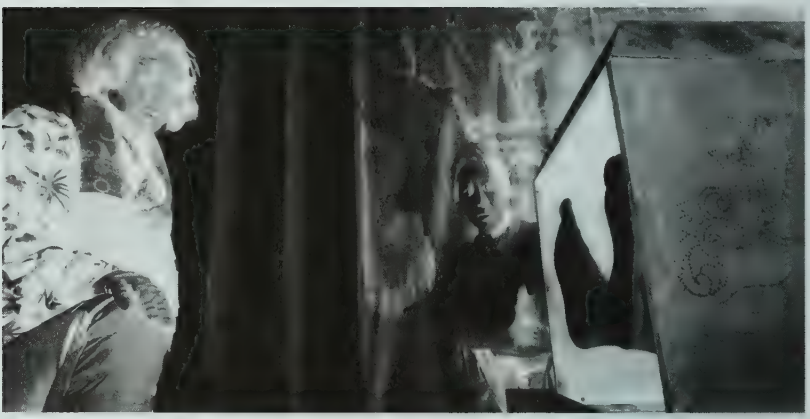
2.5 Irradiated temple and seeing past lives. Park Chan-kyong, *Belated Bosal*, 2019, HD film, black & white, 5.1-channel sound, 55 min. Installation view at MMCA Hyundai Motor Series 2019, Seoul. Photo: M. Fischer.

2.6 Manjushri with knife. Park Chan-kyong, *Belated Bosal*, 2019, HD film, black & white, 5.1-channel sound, 55 min. Installation view at MMCA Hyundai Motor Series 2019, Seoul. Photo: M. Fischer.

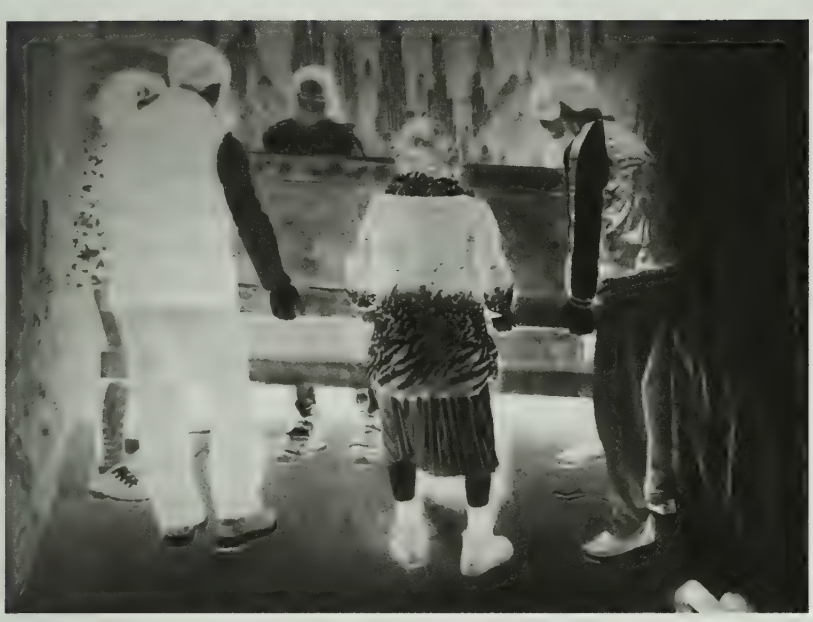
The two young women look at the statue of the Buddha in the casket in astonishment as its feet also push out and protrude from the casket (figure 2.8). The feet traditionally are said to be pointed toward the disciple who had arrived belatedly, only after which could the lighting of the pyre proceed, and there is a symbolism of two: two feet, two bodhi trees under which he dies, two worlds of life and death or this world and another (afterlife and prelife), two young men, two young women, the old woman-dancer and a male cantor (celestial music). The old woman, Bosal, directs where to place the Styrofoam rock outside the container. The two young men put up the murals of the Diamond Mountains covering the inside walls of the container, and then all six characters decorate the outside with painted flames on cardboard. They go inside, lift the casket, rotate it 360 degrees, and set it down again (figure 2.9), then sit around it and mourn, comforting one another. At one point their faces appear in realistic photography rather than the ghostly black-and-white photonegative style of the rest of the film. The inside and outside of the container are set alight, the container is closed, the fire blazes both inside and outside, and the container floats off into the sky, as black ashes fall (figure 2.10). Musical instruments fall from the sky, smashing and breaking. Bosal comforts Gahye.

More can be said about Park Chan-kyong's rich body of work, which since 2008 has been probing the densities of Korean history and engagements

2.7 Trying out the coffin. Park Chan-kyong, *Belated Bosal*, 2019, HD film, black & white, 5.1-channel sound, 55 min. Installation view at MMCA Hyundai Motor Series 2019, Seoul. Photo: M. Fischer.



2.8 Buddha's feet protrude. Park Chan-kyong, *Belated Bosal*, 2019, HD film, black & white, 5.1-channel sound, 55 min. Installation view at MMCA Hyundai Motor Series 2019, Seoul. Photo: M. Fischer.



2.9 Rotating the casket. Park Chan-kyong, *Belated Bosal*, 2019, HD film, black & white, 5.1-channel sound, 55 min. Installation view at MMCA Hyundai Motor Series 2019, Seoul. Photo: M. Fischer.

2.10 Igniting the container. Park Chan-kyong, *Belated Bosal*, 2019, HD film, black & white, 5.1-channel sound, 55 min. Installation view at MMCA Hyundai Motor Series 2019, Seoul. Photo: M. Fischer.

with modernity, including the effervescence of folk religion, shamanism, and Buddhism, not simply as alternatives to the overly rationalized modernity but as cultural resources for dealing with tragedy and disaster, a theme I address in the essay "Scratching at the Anthropocene" that I presented in the folk museum across the street ("Third Spaces and Ethnography in the Anthropocene"; see Fischer 2018c, epilogue, for a fuller version).[20] But for the moment I want to rest with the focus on the forensic use of X-ray and sensing technologies, here film and Geiger counters, to probe the dangers of modern experiences with nuclear power, as well as the perceptive visualizing registers—of the seen and the unseen, the mix of good and evil, the play of maya and cycles of destruction and rebirth, but especially the unforeseen consequences of our actions and the possibilities of some repair and some recovery by experimentation, including with such older technologies as shamanic vision *not as mystical but as social* in the modes illustrated in the film *Manshin: Ten Thousand Spirits* by shaman Kim Keum-wha's ability to involve even modern people in the *gut* rites of consolation and renewal. To repeat, as suggested above, Buddhism and shamanism remain to this day strong as a visual culture in thinking about the afterlife of the Anthropocene, not as nostalgia, but as pragmatic (in both the linguistic and philosophical senses) tools for emergent forms of life.

ETHNOGRAPHIC ADVOCACY 2: MINING AND MIGRANTS (AND MASSACRES)

Whether fortuitous or a stroke of curatorial brilliance, featured on the floor below Park's retrospective was Ayoung Kim's installation *Porosity Valley 2: Tricksters' Plot* (2019c), the then most recent of a series of installations (2017a, 2017b, 2017c, 2019b). *Porosity Valley 2: Tricksters' Plot* interrogates, in parallel and intertwined fashion, the movement of polished yellow (gold or brass) rock cubes, mined and (im)ported from Mongolia, and Yemeni war refugees fleeing via Malaysia to Jeju Island at Korea's southern tip and stuck there in asylum-immigration limbo.[21] The polished cubes are products of the orogeny (geomorphic dynamics) of the earth and of human extractivism in mining, processing, trade and commerce, barter, and conversion into monetary investments and securities—that is, physical and capital extraction of value in licit and illicit circuits of rare earths and metals.[22] *Orogeny* is a near homophone of *erogeny*: the play of the earth's cycles of creation and those of humans. Some rock formations with open-

ings are revered as cleansers of sin, granters of wishes, and new birth canals (through which one can slide or into which one can confide one's needs and wishes). Two such Mother Rocks, or Eej Khad, are especially revered in Mongolia.[23] Kim's installation intertwines orogeny and refugees' hopes for new lives like a Möbius strip: an endless asylum-seeking game (you lose, return to "home," and start again) or a Sisyphus-like never-ending journey of earth materials undergoing transformations ("the condition of our being" [Kim 2019c]). Rare earths and silicon help build the electronics in smartphones, magnets in wind turbines, information and encryption technologies, and the "smart grids," growing "neural networks," and "cloud computing" that also monitor the rare earths' journeys and transformations, in parallel to the journeys of war refugees becoming stateless migrants and incarcerated aliens. Both the quarantined rocks (rare earths) and refugees (asylum seekers) are given temporary Cloud Passage Identity Protection and are offered secure protection in the jail-like surveillance and "secure smart grid" on Jeju Island. Brilliantly colored corals are sometimes substituted for the colors of rock-borne minerals. After long journeys, under countless names, now reborn as spiritual beings, the stones and refugees observe, "For that very reason, we are assigned [by immigration and customs officials] a lousy serial number" (Kim 2019c).

Ethnographically, the inventive installation is based on fieldwork both in Mongolia (Mother Rock; extraction sites for mining rare earths) and on Jeju Island (living with the Yemeni refugees). In interviews and lectures the artist (much like Nguyen Trinh Thi) reflects on the tact required of the artist-ethnographer in order to do informed cultural critique and advocacy useful to the stranded migrants (Kim 2019a, 2020).

The installation consists of a wall-sized two-channel video, three smaller television-sized video displays, and a wall-sized snakes-and-ladders-style graphic of protocols and procedures.[24] The installation is a double meditation on processes of applying for refugee status (interrogations, temporary permits, evaluations, rejections, deportations) and on stones and rocks as where all comes from—that is, orogeny and other earth-formation processes, including human beings (in Hebrew *adam*, *adamah*, the earth, the human; from dust to dust; English *human*, from Latin *humus*).

But, further, the earth-formation processes resonate with discussions of the Anthropocene. The Anthropocene is defined by a band of plastic particles and other modern synthetic materials that are now omnipresent in all parts of the globe and that in stratigraphic geological terms differentiate the

most recent era from those that came before. Refugee flows resonate with the human effects of the Anthropocene (global warming, competitive extractive resource economies, massively increasing migrations from war and destitution).

The large two-channel screen shows three figures in white garb (two young men and one woman, it turns out) with multicolored wrappings over their heads (turbans in a sense but also covering their faces, and in colors that are more intercultural than traditional Yemeni style). They represent the Yemeni migrants who began arriving on Jeju Island from Malaysia in 2018, stirring up a media and popular frenzied fear of Islamic terrorists, incompatible cultures (inability to assimilate even to an increasingly multicultural society), and "fake" refugees (*gajja nanmin*) versus "real refugees" (*jinjja nanmin*). Malaysia had a visa-free three-month stay provision, after which the Yemeni refugees had to move on, using the discount airline Air Asia, to Jeju Island, which since 2002 had visa-free entry to encourage development. The anti-Yemeni protests caused the elimination of visa-free entry for Yemenis. Korea's approval rate for refugee applications is 4 percent. For Yemenis, only two people of some five hundred have been recognized as refugees, while 412 have been given humanitarian status. Syrians requesting refugee status have also been given only humanitarian stays.

Ayoung Kim began spending time with the Yemeni refugees, trying to interview them and observe how their lives on Jeju Island were unfolding. The three figures spin and turn, occasionally on the main screen, but mostly on the side (marginal, marginalized) screen. But they are represented prominently on the main screen abstractly by the yellow-gold or brass cubes, occasionally damaged ones with broken corners, spinning and turning, cubes that must also have been mined from older mineralized rocks and distant places. In the opening of the video, we see previews of the polished cubes, underwater coral, terrestrial rock formations, jail cages with the cubes spinning inside, and an old volcano caldera into which the cubes are dropped. The video then begins with them being assigned Cloud Passage Identity Protection, which allows information tracking via cloud computing databases. A bright, round-eyed Caucasian saleswoman in a sleeveless, knee-length yellow sheath dress gives the pitch for the information system as insurance and protection: "'Beyond the Cloud, Beyond the Border,' oceanic magic solution, there is a great deal on the border. Planning your epic journey from platform A to B? It's important to keep yourself protected." A pudgy, pink-faced male in a blue short-sleeved shirt and tie seated at a white plastic table contin-

ues the intake: "Petra Genetrix from Porosity Valley, date of birth unknown, gender not applicable. Welcome to the immigration data center (IDC)." He promises, "Millions of units of information form a blueprint to replicate and reconstruct your shelter in Porosity Valley in the same way that nature itself might have constructed the Valley." But the travelers respond skeptically through a synthesizer voice: "There has been a duplication of the event. I'm your dis-integrity. You became more plausible now within this irrecoverable failure, this unendurable purgatory."[25] And they probe further, "What residual elimination may occur in the transfer this time?"

The video prelude thus begins with orogeny, an earth-forming process that leads to both structural deformation and compositional differentiation of the Earth's lithosphere (crust and uppermost mantle) at convergent plate margins, producing the uplift of the Altaic and Henti Mountains. The homophony between *orogeny* (mountain formation) and *erogeny* (eros, erogenic) is reinforced by the play with the name of the "protagonist" (the artist's term), "Petra Genetrix," in both her earlier work *Porosity Valley: Portable Holes* (Kim 2017b) and the digital print installation *Petra Genetrix vs. Petra Gentrix* (2017b), and this one (*Porosity Valley 2*). In the earlier work, Kim linked geological migration and cultural migration through a Petra Genetrix made of minerals and rendered in 3D computer graphics that was subjected to Australia's strict immigration policies while attempting to migrate to "another platform."

In an interview about *Porosity Valley 2: Tricksters' Plot*, Kim says, "A virtual entity, Petra Genetrix can be variously defined as unidentifiable blocks of mineral, shards of data, or a life form or intelligence from a world unknown to us. In Latin, Petra Genetrix refers to the action of being 'born from the rock' or a 'fecund rock'. . . . The term's phonetics somehow gives a futuristic impression . . . [yet is also] associated with Mithraism [and the] iconic image of Mithra emerging from a rock . . . the birth of the god and the matrix itself, the mother rock" (Kim 2019a, 2020).[26]

A Korean bureaucrat conducts an intake interview for entry to Cryptic Valley. In the minimalist theater format of a table and two chairs, he sits on one chair, while the cubes spin in midair over the petitioner's chair, sometimes locating themselves as heads on the white Arab *thobe* (figure 2.11). He asks standard questions (in Korean): what is your name, where do you come from, why do you come here, tell me what you remember of your journey, state your needs. To this the stones, sometimes figured as geomorphic rock, sometimes as brilliantly colored coral underwater, but primarily as the

polished brass or gold cubes, answer in their pleasant synthesizer voice in English. The subtitles are in Korean, English, and, to the side, on the second screen, Arabic (albeit without vowel marks, so looking more like Persian). In a 2020 lecture-performance, Kim sits at a computer and sings so that the synthesizer produces layered voices, some high-pitched female, some male, some coming from her own face, sometimes as her face doubled or, as her image is folded at the waist, doubled, and laid out waist to waist. Her point is that migrants are voices of all kinds; that Petra Genetrix is collective intelligence, artificial intelligence, migration experiences of many kinds, genderless; and that the synthesizer voice is a layering of many different voices (Kim 2019a, 2020).[27]

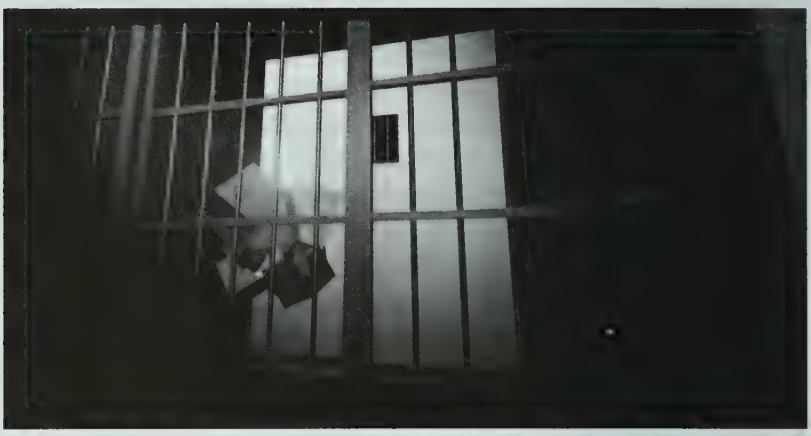
The travelers answer the Korean interrogator that they come from down deep, long ago in the water, longer ago than can be counted; that their matrix contained many memories, but recently their matrix was destroyed by an explosion, and they were split into portable form and propelled into a long journey, which is *the condition of their being*. And with some humor or exasperated irony, they say, "After the matrix exploded, we underwent a long suitability review at the immigration protection center. They made duplicates of our matrix, and we met ourselves and our clones and combined,

2.11 Interrogation. Ayoung Kim, *Porosity Valley 2: Tricksters' Plot*, 2019, two-channel video, 23 min. 4 sec. Installation view at MMCA 2019, Seoul. Photo: M. Fischer.

and the instant the portable hole opened they dropped us down here. Do you want to know if someone pointed to this place? *Would that help with this review?*" The visuals show the cubes being dropped into the lake of an old volcanic caldera. The interrogator asks what would happen if they returned where they came from, to which the synthesizer voice replies, "I won't answer such an obvious question." The interrogator says that fifty-six Lentris (characters in the multiplayer video games Warcraft and Minecraft) have already come here to Crypto Beach, that this is not a normal mode of entry, and that no more are to be allowed in, because there is a possibility of infecting particles in the valley, and entry could hurt *the platform*. The stones reply that they have been flown to a great many places, to spaces stretched along the strata for eons; that they have endured being altered for generations under countless names; and (sarcastically) that "now having been reborn as a spiritual being, for that very reason, we are assigned a lousy serial number."

The interrogator eventually grants them a six-month stay, with the possibility of an extension, depending on the Cloud Passage Identity Protection verification of their "biometric data." If it is found they are a danger, they will have to choose among three options: going back, being transported to a third destination, or being put in a *smart grid* island. They cannot stay, for they will attract more migrants, who will clump together into an uncontrollable black hole. But they need not fret: the smart grid is quite safe and optimized for them; there can be no danger until the time to leave; they will be monitored and protected twenty-four hours a day. The cubes are confined in an empty grid of jail cages (figure 2.12). Denied entry, they are told to choose their mode of departure and to do it immediately, right now; and counseled, "There is a place that remembers you." At the end of the video, the three Yemenis remove their headgear, revealing their gender and ordinariness.

On the wall to the side is a board game–like diagram of all the steps an immigrant must go through, all the forms that need filling out, the certificates, the rejection slips. In the center is the pitch woman in her knee-length yellow sheath dress, who like a cheerleader gets you started on the process without a hint of troubles to come. On another wall are three small screens, outtakes of the larger story. One focuses on Mongolia and the rock cult there, beginning with a middle-aged woman saying, "Everyone's energy resides in stones," and a man in a felt cap and shepherd's cloak speaking into a rock opening (figure 2.13). The rock is wrapped in cloth (it is a shrine), and there is an inset video window of the desert expanse surrounding the shrine.



2.12 Secure protection. Ayoung Kim, *Porosity Valley 2: Tricksters' Plot*, 2019, two-channel video, 23 min. 4 sec. Installation view at MMCA 2019, Seoul. Photo: M. Fischer.

A professor type in his book-lined office tells us, "There has been an awareness that there is an unknown being who resides in a cave that has given us birth and grace." As he speaks, his face is covered over by a video window showing a black birth canal–like cave opening, and he explains again, "One of the customs of Mongolia is passing through a rock with a hole. People can be reborn, giving up their sin. You can discover these kinds of rocks a lot in Mongolia." The middle-aged woman has now returned from the desert. She stands in her urban gem shop. A large quartz crystal floats next to her, in an inset video window, and she says, "Quartz is known as the natural computer, for it contains massive amounts of, and absorbs a lot of, information by itself." She refers to the shrine back out in the desert (another inset video window in the corner), saying the Mother Rock is where people come to pray and their wishes are granted. An information label, next to the video in her shop, explains a little bit about plate tectonics, again making the orogeny–Petra Genetrix connection.

The connections with information technologies, surveillance, and incarceration fit in an odd way with being in the building of the former Defense Security Command, which in 2011 was revealed to have had a member who had been illegally collecting the information of civilians registered in the National Health Insurance Corporation for three and a half years. Of course, Kim is quick to say, "But my works are not really about the realistic aspect of

the world. Instead I am more interested in integrating them into my experiments on the structure of the narratives in which the plots are derailed or rearranged" (Kim 2020). She goes on to interweave information and data, stones and strata, neural networks and data centers, and also "the energy of the earth since they [rare earths] were created at the time of the earth's birth" (Kim 2020) and thus contain information about that birthing process (orogeny and erogeny again).

But she does want to comment on contemporary environmental politics. There is, she claims, "among the Mongolians a widespread belief that stones (the silicon basis of computing) should be kept at their places and when one moves it, it becomes ill for three days" (Kim 2020) (or however long it takes to debug). This notion that stones should not be moved from their places may be somewhat incoherent—the earth erodes, deposits silt and stones, and blows sand about; glacial moraines move boulders; volcanoes spew ash and rock and lava; tectonic plates move; and we earthlings could not build our environments without moving stones, rock, dirt, and sand (even without engaging in land reclamation, cement, and conglomerate rock for con-

2.13 Mother Rock. Ayoung Kim, *Porosity Valley 2: Tricksters' Plot*, 2019, two-channel video, 23 min. 4 sec. Installation view at MMCA 2019, Seoul. Photo: M. Fischer.

struction). It also may be somewhat romantic: she associates the widespread belief "among Mongolians" with their nomadism, a way of life that does not disturb the earth; and there are stones that can cure by absorbing the aberrant energies of illnesses, and stones thought to be alive. And although it seems opposed to her humanitarian concern for refugees and migrants, her notion of not ripping things and people out of their places gestures toward the imbrication of material components of our emergent technological worlds: silicon substrates, neural network models of brains and computing, and new appreciations of complex ecological interactions, and of concerns for the toxicities and anthropogenic climate changes unleashed. "I thought," she benignly concludes, "that this way of life was very futuristic and eco-friendly" (Kim 2020).

And indeed, from other perspectives, more environmental policy-shaping, the idea that stones should not be moved from their places is part of a contested history of (1) preserving nature, especially preventing mining and digging of all kinds in order to protect a pastureland—a Mongolian point of view—and (2) preventing the development of agriculture also, as an earlier incursion and destruction of pasture, in this case by Han settlers, and over the course of the long, increasingly Sinicized Manchu Qing rule, a resistance to agriculture in general even by Mongolians themselves.[28] From these political-economic and culture-preserving perspectives, the brass and gold cubes are perhaps indeed the "rare earth" minerals being mined in Mongolia for export to sustain electronic technologies. Their ragged edges in a few of the shots become vivid tokens of their being ripped from the earth in destructive ways, ways that probably can never be remediated either physically, or more to the point of the video's themes, in terms of the disturbed social fabric.[29]

More might be said about Ayoung Kim's work, especially by plumbing her earlier works on petroleum and bitumen, and her own migratory existence exploring the world as she gets residencies in different places.[30] Residencies are themselves spaces of intensity that bear ethnographic exploration as new cosmopolitan nodes of exchange.[31] "*Porosity Valley* is an allegory for many different things," including residencies, and as she says, it is "a *platform* for her to explore things that don't stay in place—porosity of language and plot, involving speculative narrative with supernatural or futuristic elements" (Kim 2020).

Porosity Valley 2 offers an allegorical/analogical structure, pairing the earth and refugees' displacements and migrations. It provides a jarring,

wonderful juxtaposition and even challenge by a younger-generation artist to Park Chan-kyong's exhibition upstairs, which is perhaps more a rebus-like structure, using familiar Buddhist imagery in contemporary dress, updating a parable-like structure, and putting on display the deadlock between the visible and the invisible, that which we experience and that which we know only through our prosthetic instrumentation but which can attack our biological well-being and indeed our existence.

RECOVERY (OF HONOR) AND REPARATION (FOR VICTIMS)

There is yet a further subterranean referentiality to be plumbed on Jeju Island. It is not only positioned as the "Hawaii" of Korea, a tourist attraction, the place to which the students on the *Sewol* ferry were headed. It is not only a place that tried to position itself as welcoming immigrants with visa-free access, who might contribute to economic development, until they sparked a kind of xenophobic panic and immune response. But more profound, still partly repressed and still difficult to process (for both the local community and the state), are the events of the Jeju massacres, the 4.3 Event (April 3, 1948), beginning as a small communist uprising but quickly turning into a sustained (seven-year) state terrorist campaign against "the reds" by the anticommunist South Korean state, established on August 15, 1948. Only in 2003 did then president Roh Moo-hyun apologize for the state violence, one of the first violent ideological struggles of the early Cold War, and for the devastation visited on the islanders, killing a tenth of the population (some thirty thousand) and destroying a third of the three hundred village communities.

Of note in the present context are the updating and reinvention of ritual processes to recover, repair, and reweave new social worlds for postmemory generations (those after the survivor generation). For these postmemory generations, access to what happened is mediated by "imaginative investment, projection, and creation through stories, images and other reminders and remainders of family experiences" (Hirsch 2008, 107), and for Jeju these mediations importantly are processed through spirit possession and reburials (E.-S. Kim 2018; S. Kim 2019; Kwon 2020). For instance, a survivor who had suppressed details of what she knew until she could no longer remember told her children that they should recover what happened through a shamanic rite in which the shaman (*simbang*) could channel her voice and have access to all she had forgotten or repressed. Repression for her was some-

times quite physical as she, during her entire posttrauma life, would defecate when worried or scared, triggered originally by the torching of her village and the soldiers' search for people to kill (E.-S. Kim 2018). One is reminded here of Valentine Daniels's (1996) account of a young survivor who tried to narrate his family being killed in the Sri Lanka civil war but would repeatedly lose consciousness when he tried. The self-censorship, repression, and inability to speak of *holeomeong* (widowed women) who lost husbands and sons in the massacres are akin to what Veena Das (2000) has called "poisonous knowledge" among women rescued in the Partition experiences of the Indian-Pakistan subcontinent, that both the suspicions of sexual violation and their knowledge of the behind-the-scenes secrets of families would tear marriage alliances, households, and their own support systems apart. The fear in Jeju, in a world of guilt by association (*yeonjwajwoe*), is similarly that if one talked about a husband, one might implicate a son and that exposing old fictive kinship relationships used for survival could upset the village order and the narratives that families told about themselves.

Ghosts of the unburied traditionally are dealt with by shamans (called on Jeju *simbang*), while ancestral rites (*jesa*) are dealt with by male descendants. Heonik Kwon points out that women are more active in the shamanic rites, and the spirits invited are wider kin relations, often matrilateral and sometimes affinal ones. (Compare the recovery through shamans of kinship ties in postsocialist Mongolia, detailed in Buyandelger [2013].) The *jesa* ancestors are patriarchal because in the thirteenth-century Confucian reform, Korea switched from bilateral kinship to patrilateral reckoning. During annual ancestor-day rites, both kinds of ritual are held, with many spirits descending on village houses. In cemeteries there are now graves with mounds indicating proper burials, and graves with only stone markers inscribed "4.3 gravestone." Between 2006 and 2010, there were a series of mass-grave exhumations and reburials in cemeteries, and memorial halls were built on the sites of the massacres. Also on those sites, since 1998, the Cheju 4.3 Shamanic Ritual for the Consolation of Pent-Up Hearts and the Mutual Rebirth of the Dead is held, partly in efforts to move ghosts into being ancestors (S. Kim 2019).

Kwon (2020) points out that lamentations during these variously reconfigured rituals are a principal aesthetic instrument of Korean rituals of resistance and also that while in April the island transforms into a public world of commemoration, the coordination of such rituals has shifted from the anticommunist families of local civil servants and paramilitary killed by the

communist militia (perhaps a third of the civilian deaths) to families on the side of the majority of the civilians, who either had connections to the communist resistance or, in most cases, were caught in the cross fire between the warring sides. The struggle for recognition of the pain on all sides has caused a number of crises, he notes, in the Association of Bereaved Families of 4.3 Victims, and Seong Nae Kim (2019) points out that since 2005, when the association formed, it is the sons of the widows (*holeomeong*), the postmemory generation, who are driven to find out what happened but whose access is mediated, often fragmented, and indirect.

In sum, the history of Jeju Island—arguably even more than the historical layers on which the MMCA, the Gyeongbokung Palace, and the somewhat shorter (British colonial) history of the site on which the NTU CCA sits—illustrates the complexities of the historical (un)conscious, which is probed and reconfigured for new twenty-first-century worlds in artworks such as Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Cemetery of Splendor* and *Fireworks/Archives*; Park Chan-kyong's *Belated Bosal*, *Citizen Forest*, and *Manshin: Ten Thousand Spirits*; Nguyen Trinh Thi's work with Master Luu Ngoc Duc; Choy Ka Fai's efforts to reanimate Hijikata Tatsumi's dance; and Hsu Chia-Wei's vision of a dying cinema birthing a new animism by way of animation. The goal is not to merely point to cultural resources that are used to deal with the ruptures of the past that reverberate in the present, nor the new technologies that might be used to simply access them in mediated forms. The artworks here, I suggest, are actively creating new modes of experience, of sensibilities that must include most urgently the ecological disruption and migration patterns that Ayoung Kim's work articulates, and the radiation despoilment shown in *Belated Bosal* or worried about by Nguyen Trinh Thi for the new nuclear plants planned for the Cham region. They point to new modes of post-survivor-generation sociality articulated in Hsu's effort to complete Weerasethakul's vision of a dying cinema and the birth of a new *animism*, using both (1) demotic theater with autobiographical narration involving village actors and video of puppet and dance backdrops, in order to address the next generation as well as fellow citizens; and (2) new *animation* platforms that play with both (a) hyperrealism (Hsu's reconstruction of a temple from China on an island between Taiwan and China and in geometric abstract space) and (b) abstraction (Kim's cubes representing the extraction of minerals and humans).

But above all they draw on rich ethnographic inquiry into places and people. They provide a form of para-ethnography, a parallel and complement

to what anthropologists also do, and often with an insider-outsider sensibility, a recognition of what is not only felicitous but can serve as a cultural entry, a sensitivity to where the fractures and disagreements are, where the local stakes are. An editor friend says not to lose sight of the film in too much footage, but on the contrary the anthropologist and the artist reply that the footage, the particulars, the meaning, and the pragmatics of use are the object, however delightfully slippery and however phantasmic the desire for an elusive object might be. And it is precisely in the *play* of *all* those elements that the more general aesthetics of art and anthropology resides and emerges, or as Carlos Fausto (2020) puts it, that the "art effects," the sense of life, are created.

CONCLUSION: HAUNTOLOGY, HABITABILITY, POSTMODERN FUTURES

Specters of the future haunt Asia. Hauntology is the recognition that shadowing every ontology, ideology, or hegemonic claim are alternative histories and interpretations. This is part of the condition of the postmodern: neither a historical era, nor an erasure of history, but a broadened condition of knowledge or multiple postings among fragments of many modernities. To have future traction, hauntologies do not attach merely to forests, abandoned land or buildings, or graveyards but to a broader understanding of how ecological relations of pasts and futures affect habitability. The NTU CCA exhibition *Ghosts and Specters: Shadows of History* and the MMCA exhibitions *Gathering* and *Porosity Valley 2* open sight and action lines of Asian ethnographic inquiries and artistic experimentalism. They probe emergent *synthetic realisms* (or an emergent common sense) open to the technological future and to critiques of the transnational present. They are *synthetic realisms* made up partly of gritty survivorship and partly of an ability to metabolize old and new transnational cultural circulations into local trajectories.

3

Feminage, *Warang*, and the Nervous System (Hauntology and Curation)

Java is very dense, population wise. There are people everywhere, and I want to create that psychological tension in my works. My space, your space, encroaching onto each other; I want to represent that emotional feeling, and that's why they are all connected with intestines or wires, it's about our connection to each other. — ENTANG WIHARSO, "ENTANG WIHARSO AND SALLY SMART," *OCULA*

. . . to visualise into painting, drawing, constructing, amplifying, distilling, cutting and pinning, over and over till the energy of this process synthesizes or reveals what appears complete, and the assemblage is resolved. — SALLY SMART, "ENTANG WIHARSO AND SALLY SMART," *OCULA*

Join me for a curatorial walk-through of *Conversation: Endless Acts in Human History* with the artists Entang Wiharso and Sally Smart at the National Gallery of Indonesia on its opening days, January 14–15, 2016. Step in and out of the discussion as you would in a gallery or an all-night *wayang kulit* (puppet-shadow play) performance. *Conversation: Endless Acts in Human History* is theatrically fun and challenging in part because nothing holds stable: the images change, both when one looks again and because each is but part of larger series. Even the titles are not stable: the same pieces sometimes carry different titles. Context matters as pieces and their variants rotate in and out of other shows. They are a language, a web of meanings. Catalogs, too, show other works, substitute variants that are

not in the show but serve as forms of annotation, signage, or extensions of meaning. Enter with me into the dreamworlds, the gaps between perception and reality, beyond good and evil, into the determinations to repair, resew, patch, and reconfigure.

YOGYAKARTA: PREP WORK

> All over the city [of Yogyakarta], choreographers, musicians, filmmakers, puppeteers and rappers are bursting the boundaries of [formalized] styles and their conventions. There's a gallery scene with painters, sculptors and cartoonists whose works have made contemporary art from Indonesia the sensation of [international art shows]. . . . Only a few events [in Jogja Art Week] require tickets, and reservations are nearly unheard of. You just show up.
>
> DONALD FRAZIER, "ON JAVA, A CREATIVE EXPLOSION IN AN ANCIENT CITY"

I visited during Jogja Art Week in June 2015 when Sally Smart and Entang Wiharso were working together at Wiharso's Black Goat Studio. We all went around to visit other artists' studios. One of the fascinations of the current arts scene was the network of activity extending internationally through residencies and shows, circulations, exchanges, and influences. There is little state support in Indonesia. Artists turn their own homes and studios into galleries, provide residencies to help colleagues, and invite visiting international artists. Catalogs are important annotators, as are the journalists and scholars who follow the careers not just of the artists but also of the art networks and help with contextual interpretation and situating the art as signs and indexicals of broader changes in cultural consciousness.[1] The year 2007 was a turning point in the international market for Indonesian art, when auction sales of two Indonesian artists suddenly skyrocketed.[2]

Puppets provide a fascinating thread in such local and international circuits, from socialist "people's education" initiatives in the post–World War II period from Czechoslovakia and Ghana to the continuing Bread and Puppets and Honk! Festival of New England and the work today of Entang Wiharso and Sally Smart, as do the many other media, styles, and materials that both employ in their work.[3] Particularly important in the work displayed in *Conversation: Endless Acts in Human History* is Wiharso's use of aluminum, the "softest metal, like paper, giving a domestic feel," made

from recycled aluminum objects; as well as Smart's recovery of surrealist and Dada genealogies of avant-garde European puppet making, dance, and feminage (feminist collage) after World War I in refusal of all the institutions that made the war possible.[4]

These works of art are no longer constrained by nationalist identity politics or the periodization of art styles. Postindependence, post-decolonialization, and post-Reformasi, they are part of the breakout of Southeast Asian and Pacific art onto the global stage, part of the Asian shift in "what is happening" generally. They embroider in older references but move confidently beyond them, providing double horizons (Wiharso, 2022b). With both humor and a steady demand for a humane world beyond gender inequality or peripheralization, their art points to the faults of the world and ways to move on.

EXPLOSIVE TIMING

It was as if a frequent comment by Wiharso about Java and his artwork had suddenly erupted in hyperreal illustration: "Perhaps the chaos, speed and a kind of 'short-cut mentality' in Java are the body's response to the 'movementality' in Java, they are the body's response to the movements and geological conditions of the island itself. Forces of vibration affect neurological systems, acceptance and rejection of the past and present . . . people are only aware of a small fragment of a much larger narrative" (Wiharso, January 15, 2016).[5]

At 10:40 a.m., just before noon prayers, in the civic and symbolic center of Jakarta, only a few blocks from the National Gallery, where *Conversations: Endless Acts in Human History* would open in the evening, in front of the Sarinah Mall, down the street from the United Nations office, Syria's uncivil civil war and Indonesia's faltering homegrown militant Islamic movements staged a set of explosions, intended as an aftershock and replay of the coordinated terrorist attacks in Paris two months earlier.[6] Three suicide bombers and two gunmen destroyed a police post in the middle of Jalan Thamrin, blew out the windows of a Starbucks, and shot at bystanders, leaving themselves and two others dead (one Indonesian, one Canadian) and two dozen injured (five police, fifteen Indonesians, and four foreigners: an Austrian, a German, a Dutchman, and an Algerian). Jakarta's police and Indonesia's military moved in with elite squads and a dramatic show of armored personnel carriers. In four hours it was over. Six more unexploded bombs were found (Parlina, Fitri, Ramadhani, and Sundaryani 2016).

Sarinah Mall, named by President Sukarno after his nanny, was Indonesia's first commercial mall, built in the 1960s, partly with Japanese war reparations. It was meant to sell good-quality, Indonesian-made commodities at affordable prices. The bombing and shooting happened around the corner from the hotel where my wife and I were staying. When we arrived a few hours later, there were still notices on each of the guest beds that there was an emergency outside and that guests were requested to remain in the hotel.

The opening, a few hours after the attack, went ahead as scheduled. People came affirming solidarity and refusing to be intimidated. There were rallies the next day under the banner *Kami Tak Takut Teror* ("we are not afraid of terror"). Natalie King, the cocurator (with Suwarno Wisetrotomo), would say at the opening and again at the curatorial walk-through with the artists the next morning that "we need to remind ourselves that art and artistic activity provide a haven, and artists are the guardians of the imagination." Thus, she said, the opening marked "an important day for Jakarta."

CURATORIAL THEATER SPACE, MATERIALS, AND VOCABULARIES

Conversations, like theater, require turn taking. Curators stage spatial sequencing, episodes, or acts. One can of course come and go. But *Conversations: Endless Acts in Human History* seemed to be staged in six acts: (1) Green Room, (2) Going Inside, (3) Cutting So the World Does Not Stay the Same, (4) Breaking Free, (5) Garden Promise and Treed Memory, and (6) Primal Scenes.

Two walls at right angles display Wiharso's *No Hero No Cry* (2006–7) on the left and Smart's *The Exquisite Pirate (Java Sea)* (2016) on the facing right wall (plate 6). They signal themes (puppetry, performance, dreamwork), techniques (cutouts, sculpture), topics (the oneiric nature of reality under the skin, mask, pose, advertising, propaganda), and a visual vocabulary (steampunk metal tubing, tropical vines, forests, Batman figures, bathtubs, cars, buses and trucks, a round four-eyed grinning face, a male and female couple—the same couple everywhere, the Indonesian artist and his American wife, often with their two sons—tables [for food, dissection, and discussion], lace making, intricate metalwork, scissors and pins, cloth and steel trees, shadows and dancing, dressing and collaging). In the interior of the exhibition, one moves deeper into the unconscious or dreamwork toward primal scenes (looping videos, breaking through walls).

No Hero No Cry hangs up (literally, and in the sense of putting aside) the traditional, well-used, fading, and stained *wayang kulit* puppets. Both Sukarno and Suharto, the former presidents of Indonesia, mythologized themselves as the god Semar, a popular wayang character, indigenous to Indonesia (not a character from the Indian epics), able to mediate between God and humans, a wise peasant who upsets the aristocratic hierarchies.

Puppets also, in part, once represented permission for Wiharso to paint and sculpt. Growing up in a Muslim family, Wiharso discovered that the fifteenth-century Muslim saint Sunan Kalijaga had artisans cut three lines into the necks of leather puppets, calling these cuts "corpse markers" to show the figures were not alive, were not in competition with God. Wiharso followed suit, applying paint with a palette knife, "etching" into the figures to show they were not living (author's interview; also Jennong 2015). (A variant has it that throwing shadows rather than showing the figures directly was invoked as an equally good permission.[7]) Wiharso then used various carnivalesque distortions and also clown-like comic humor to dramatize feelings of attachment, estrangement, love, fear, and pain and the liberation of psychologically overcoming traditional, customary, or local restrictions and boundaries (including the dogmas of artistic style promoted in the Institut Seni Indonesia Yogyakarta [ISI Yogyakarta], or Indonesian Institute of the Arts, Yogyakarta, when he was a student).[8] The shift from *Mahabharata* to comics, in part, also has to do with the birth of his sons, four new intercultural eyes. The satirical and comedic elements come partly from superhero comic books and perhaps also partly from the *gara gara* traditions of wayang; when clowns (including Semar) appear, there is chaos, and anything can happen.

Jan Mrazek (2019) notes that a similar shift occurs in wayang performances themselves. A similar shift can also be seen in the artworks of Heri Dono and Eko Nugroho. And one wonders if James Peacock's (1968) earlier observations in Surabaya in the early 1960s of proletarian *ludruk* dramas being coded as *kasar* (crude) while wayang was coded as *alus* (refined) are reflected here as well, in being simultaneously a defacement of older court arts and normative styles taught in art school and an absorption of new modes of "realism" (*realis*, in the language of the puppet masters), visualization, and time, absorbed from film (kung fu, Mickey Mouse) and television. "The appeal of realism," Mrazek quotes one of his puppet-master informants, "is in making everything visible, especially things that previously were just alluded to but not exposed to sight" (2019, 64). The realism

refers to the reality of television, a reality in the world today, which comes along with the visualization of utterances (cupping hands to someone's ear to "whisper") and the constant replacement of bits (as in the news cycle), so that all characters become clowns, time is made "short, calculated and limited" (to fit the television business needs of "ratings, advertising, advertisements"), and remote seeing (tele-vision) is made an ordinary stream of novelty and the other. While critics bemoan the loss of older forms, of tradition, and of cultivation of the *imajinasi batin* (inner imagination), this is today's, and especially children's, *realis* (realism). *Realis* is in puppet masters' idiom "non-wayang" (Mrazek 2019, 64).

Like Batman, perhaps, who as a child saw his parents murdered, so, too, Wiharso says about Java, "I remember when there was *political turmoil.* There is a lot of *violence* and there is a lot of *disaster*, [the eruptions of the volcano] Mt. Merapi, also tsunami and earthquake" (January 15, 2016).

> *The crowd and bustle present in my work is a way to present the conditions that exist in Java: a teeming and chaotic island that has experienced accelerated, sporadic changes. For someone experiencing this environment for the first time, it is difficult to see the structure yet the disorder itself is a structure that provides benefits to many people.* (*Ocula* 2016)

> I worry, though, that living in these conditions makes it difficult for us to think deeply. Perhaps the chaos, speed and a kind of short-cut mentality in Java are the body's response to the movements and geological conditions of the island itself. (Wiharso, January 15, 2016)

From America, he says, he can see his society more clearly, recognizing himself as a half, the other half being his American wife.[9] The *ornamentation*, the intricacy of his metalwork, the way each item is linked to others, expresses the feeling of chaos, anxiety, and the creation of spaces of security and of hyperawareness through multiple eyes and perspectives. "*[Although each piece is] all one metal sheet, they come out like lots of ornaments, ornamentation to support each other, [so we] can understand the movement and signs of the body*" (January 15, 2016). Working with Sally Smart provides further complementation from yet another, connected part of the world.

No Hero No Cry (an everyman position wanting to avoid imprisonment and torture) displays seven wayang-like figures with articulated arms and legs; one has an extra leg, and some of the limbs end in crab claws, tendrils, or a kris (ceremonial dagger). Some figures have alternative heads, or a head

and a mask dangling from the neck or held in a hand; one is headless with a puff of smoke from a small pipe in the neck. In one variant the headless wayang is being handed a head as if for a costume change. One has a brown-and-green patterned mask and dress with a tail of what might be a Komodo dragon or armadillo over his genitals and green cactus horns (plate 7).

In the center is a puppet in a colonial coat and tie, arms crossed like Stamford Raffles, who invaded Java as far as Borobudur and characteristically stood with arms crossed; or perhaps it is the Governor-General from 1808 to 1811, Herman Willem Daendels, who built the thousand-kilometer Great Post Road across northern Java and who figures in several of Wiharso's works. Two of the wayang figures have the insignia of Batman and Superman on their chests, and a third has a *gunungan*, or evergreen tree of life, shedding leaves and inscribed "Gempa Buken, Jempa Wisata" (Earthquake Buken, Hammering Travel).[10] The Batman figure holds in one hand two masks of the artist-*dhalang* (puppet master) with tongues hanging out (wanting to speak, orating through his pictures). Two more heads of the artist-*dhalang* float above the wayangs upside down, facing each other with their very long tongues touching, tongues that can recite very long epic poems in which the wayang puppets are dramatis personae. In another variant they are right side up at the bottom of the installation, and their tongues form a bridge on which two fighting cocks battle.

The tongue, Wiharso says, "is like a snake talking to identity" (January 15, 2016): "The human tongue that transforms into a snake or fire refers to how the tongue is a powerful organ that can be used as a tool to create manifestos, influence, lies and propaganda; or the tip of the tongue turns into a crab leg to discuss clichés about Indonesia as a nation of idlers who just talk and walk slowly; or the tip of the tongue turns into a hand holding a knife to depict back stabbers or traitors" (Ocula 2016). Likewise, knives, the kris, and pins can be symbols of protection as well as aggression: a woman carries a small pin or kris in her hair in Java as a symbol of protection.

Smart's *Exquisite Pirate (Java Sea)* responds to Wiharso in the green room or antechamber, with a mash-up of Western- and Indonesian-style ships, female pirates, and post-wayang puppetry. The sea peoples of Southeast Asia plied the maritime worlds from Australia and New Zealand to the Philippines, South China, Borneo, and the Malay Peninsula, a precursor in reality and a version of Paul Eluard's 1929 *Surrealist Map of the World*.[11] These peoples (Bajau, Bugis, *orang laut*, and others) had the *pinisi* ships with tall masts that Smart's cutouts evoke, among many other kinds of ships

(plate 19: *Exquisite Pirate [Oceania]*, 2006).[12] The *pinisi* hulls hybridize dhow and schooner, adapted from seventeenth-century Dutch *pinas* (pinnace) ships (built in New England as well as Indonesia; see Burnham 2016). They grace the hundred-rupiah Indonesian banknote. Today they have motors. Indonesian ships are mentioned in the oral legends and genealogical histories of the Australian Aborigines from before contact with white colonists. Ships, of course, also brought those white colonists.

More important, Smart's ships are a form of feminage and a nod to the contemporary fights over Australian immigration politics regarding refugees from Southeast Asia. She was inspired while working at the Darwin Museum in the Northern Territories. The Darwin port is again in the maritime news in 2016. A commercial company linked to the Chinese government has just obtained a ninety-nine-year lease for the port. In the museum Smart was struck by the interesting flags and floral patterns decorating the old Indonesian ships, in a way feminizing them. And she came to wonder (also as the mother of a young boy, whom she took to see the film *Treasure Island*) whether there were women pirates and, if so, what they looked like, whether they passed as men or kept their female identities.

The pirate ship cutouts are stunning. At first sight, they are like sharp black silhouettes on the horizon. As they/you come closer, bits of bright color wink at you and begin the brain's effort at identification. As they/you draw near, the ships reveal themselves as collages of patterned cloth; the eye flicks back and forth between the two sets of references: patterned and largely female textile arts and largely male seafaring. At the bow of the larger ship, a bright blue scarf flutters over a skull disarticulated from a large bleached-white ribcage sprawling over the ship's edge. In a subsequent hanging in Galeria Canna, the skeleton hangs and swings in freefall from the bow.

There is, both for Smart and for me, an aesthetic pleasure in integrating elements as they come into focus, in attending to alternative cultural expressions and playing with gender codes. A pirate sentinel stands to the side in dark red pantaloons and skirt, a black patterned shirt, and a black pillow hat, with a fabulous black-and-white cubist face with a dangling earring, a nose ring, and a white bird tattooed between the eyebrows, brilliantly accessorized with one black glove, while the other is bright blue, red, and white. Two black parrots, facing away from each other, sit on the pirate's shoulders, like a split heraldic double-headed eagle, and on the pirate's chest an octopus is painted hanging head down, before, in the next room, taking on a more

prominent role. When hung a bit away from the wall, the ships' shadows take on the aspect of ghostly vessels, multiplying the fleets haunting the seas, as in the poster for Smart's 2009 show *The Exquisite Pirate—South China Sea*.[13]

Ships and puppets, becalmed and at rest, signal narrative play to be set in motion.

GOING INSIDE: PAINTED METAL, POP SHADOWS AND LIGHT, FANTASIES ON THE LOOSE

> Aluminum is the lightest and softest kind of metal. It is a type of metal that is associated with "domesticity" because it is widely used for household items. This makes a nice connection with paper as a humble yet essential material of daily life.
>
> ENTANG WIHARSO, QUOTED IN AGUNG HUJATNIKA JENNONG, "DID I JUST SAY YES"

> [Entang Wiharso's] choice of material and an increasingly eye-catching aesthetic are used to draw the audience in and impel contact. The beautiful aspects of his work, glossy surfaces, saturated hues and the delicate line of his landscapes, invite us into environments that are disturbing, distorted and chaotic.
>
> CHRISTINE E. COCCA, INTRODUCTION TO *TRILOGY: GEO-PORTRAITS*

Going inside the exhibition, *going inside* the mind, dreaming, playing the perceptual against the real. As one enters the exhibition, one is first confronted with a large, mesmerizing resin-cast, hyperreal forest of bamboo. Four sculptural figures, a family, in dark sarongs and *kebaya*, with the adults' hair tied in tall traditional topknots, kneel in front of the forest, backs to the viewer (plate 8). With one hand, they hold a rope or intestine or umbilical cord behind their backs: the family connection. The intestine-rope attaches at one end to a sleeping or dead dog. On first approach, the tableau has both a serene and a potentially alarming air, an undecidable figuration of impending execution or of prayerful meditation. When one looks at the figures from their front, with one hand by their sides, looking introspectively down rather than into the forest, the air seems less threatening but nonetheless ambiguous. Wiharso explains that the idea is about conflict, using the metaphor of intestines for emotion and suffering: "Conflict between two families or neighbors.[14] When you have a conflict everybody is injured. Even

though somebody wins, there is no win, everybody is injured. So this is the idea." And with regard to the metaphor:

> In Javanese philosophy, you know, it is like [your] intestines, in your mind you have put a thing, but you have [a] long intestine. The intestine is the drama, your inner state, and the bamboo is the border, like earlier using birch trees, but this time using bamboo. The inspiration was when I visited a bamboo forest in Rhode Island, yes, a massive one. I will put in another story: last year, in the hot season, they had a massive fire. A story in the forest, and this gas [on the right side of the artwork] is sort of like [the fire].

And with regard to the material: "It is now still in resin, but it will be in metal. It is like an artist's proof. But it will be in metal."

All the images in both artists' corpuses are serial. Meaning thus gets worked out, elaborated, expanded, and redirected over time. Pieces reappear in different shows like recombinatories setting the context for new works. The title of this piece is *Reclaim Paradise—Paradise Lost No. 2*. The original, *Reclaim Paradise* (2015), has the family standing in front of a bluish-white–colored birch forest (instead of the bamboo green of No. 2). As a pair, the two variants seem to face across the world in opposite directions, toward Indonesia (bamboo) and toward New England (birch), as this intercultural family lives alternatively in each country. At the New England forest, the artist-father is portrayed nude, culturally bare or receptive. The elder son, in only a T-shirt, is halfway between the father and the American mother (casual in camisole and *shalvar*); the younger son, like the mother, is casual in T-shirt and *shalvar*.

The bamboo forest is populated with more mystery, enchantment, passion, danger, and perhaps memory. In the *Mahabharata* the forest is where one goes for meditation, spiritual renewal, and escape from the conflicts of the city, but it is also where one can encounter shape-shifting evil. A paradisiacal and calm small image of love—husband and wife seated, entwined—floats high in the center of the forest wall. A shadowy metallic figure below slips into the bamboo. A comedic bathtub floats in the upper left with the family four, in silvered aluminum, in bright blue water, one son in Batman headgear, the other in floppy bunny ears, and the husband submerged to his eyes with fire coming out of his head. A Batman, blue jeaned and bare chested, holds the bathtub from below. To the right a white man floats, breathing into (or asphyxiating via) metal tubing attached to a gas heater.

Other paintings of these (birch) forest panels include a large five-panel oil on linen (300 by 1,000 centimeters), shown at Art Stage Singapore, portraying a standing husband and wife facing each other holding onto connecting intestines knotted into their braided hair, with a second long intestine coming from a bloody red section of the forest, in which two dogs, spotted like the birchbark, tear at the attached entrails (*Borderless: Reclaim Landscape*, 2013; see Wiharso 2014, 289). In *Rejected Landscape* (2012), dark, rain-threatening skies drip indigo onto an ice-white surface, as a black dog, red penis and tongue extended, watches the couple making love. The wolf-dog brings to mind many possible interpretive openings, including Sigmund Freud's Wolf Man case, or perhaps Cerebus, who guards the gates to hell, or the Zoroastrian four-eyed dog who can see into the next world, or the hunting dogs of the Prophet Muhammad and the protector dog of the seven sleepers in the cave mentioned in the Qur'an, Surah al-Kahf (Surah of the Cave). In *Undeclared Landscape* (2013), two spotted dogs frolic next to the husband and wife as they embrace standing, a protective sword or kris between their legs (see Wiharso 2014, 269, 263). In later work, the dogs become more clearly wild dogs or hyenas waiting for attack orders from a diseased and corrupted fascist-style leader (see appendix).

The forest, positioned at the beginning of the show, functions not unlike the tree of life *gunungan* at the beginning of a shadow play. The fanlike *gunungan* is painted with paired and complementary or opposed symbols (gate/tree, tiger/bull, unseen world/this world, mask/interiority).

As one turns into the main exhibition space, bright metal cutouts, "glossy painted surfaces," catch the eye. It is pop art and comic book style, buses, cars, pickup trucks, and stylized people, but as you look more closely, the fine detailing, often in gray-green shadow, draws you in, engages you in Javanese "movementality," "density," and "people everywhere," fighting, loving, and always interconnected through nervous systems, pipes, wires, and rifles bent into further pipelike connections, or, where there is forest, by tropical lianas and vines. Wiharso often also repeats the thought that "noise, like [that of the] cell phone [or Superman comics] comes [to be] debated in our bodies." It is like Viktor Tausk's (1933) influencing machines. In Wiharso's version, "like a dream, . . . my body became a mediator of the electro-magnetic wave, . . . people who live in Java are different than people who live in Rhode Island or Boston or Nordic countries, because if you live in Java there is a lot of movement . . . every second, there is movement in the ground, [which] travel[s] to our nerves and [the] respon[se] in every indi-

vidual [is] different . . . is why when I live in Jogja, I feel like hurry, life is too short."

A bright two-tone orange-and-white Volkswagen bus comes into view first, spilling out people (aluminum and car paint). The bus's front is emblazoned with a Batman head extending a long red tongue, and four color-coded electrical wires extend from its hose-like rubber neck.[15] Labeled *Promising Landscape* (2015) for this show—called *The Other Dream: I Love You Too Much* in a postexhibit show at Galeria Canna—it is also one of the *Delicate Organ: Volks Wagon Series* (a yellow VW bus heading in the other direction, a four-eyed grinning face at the steering wheel, with unpainted aluminum figures entering and surrounding it, pictured in the exhibition catalog (Wiharso and Smart 2016a).[16] Both buses emerge out of a chaotic darkness into the bright spotlight of color as if they have just crashed in and come to an abrupt halt in front of two blue-and-white Dutch-style pitched-roof buildings (plate 9). The building behind has an industrial chimney, and the one in front has a domestic chimney, each puffing out toxics or smoke, as does a pipe at the rear of the bus. Leaning against the front of the bus, James Dean–like, is a figure in tropical whites. Two more white men are in the front seat of the bus, one pointing ahead from the left window, the other looking back and up out the right window toward a rifle being lifted onto the roof, and a comic strip–style conversation bubble has him saying, "Why so hard to love?" Batmen are all over the place, both in color at the bus and in metallic gray surrounding the lighted area. One of the metal batmen climbs the roof of the house; another stands guard, like an *X*, legs and arms apart, in front of the house's red garage door, a red window in place of his head, and his long left arm touches the head of a metal figure talking to the James Dean figure leaning on the bus.

At the open-door side of the orange van-bus, two (Batman-style) hooded figures push, pull, or catch a man clad only in underpants falling headfirst out of the van. The Batman catching the man is also clad only in underpants. The female figure inside the van is crouching nude and holds onto a rifle attached at the stock end with a metal cable to one hand of the falling man, and at the barrel end held by the man on the roof, who is being made love to by his female partner. A fifth small comic Batman climbs up the red tie of the man in the front seat as it hangs out of the bus's window. At the rear of the bus, a punk-spiked red-haired figure faces away, forming a kind of protective perimeter and holding a second rifle, whose barrel bends and attaches to the head of the male lover on the top of the bus.

The couple on the roof is a frequent visual unit in Wiharso's work, and a version in "living color" will appear separately nearby called (also) *The Other Dream: I Love You Too* or *I Love You Too Much*. The couple on the roof is done in metal shadow. They reappear in a different position below the bus. There the male looks dead and metallic, while the woman's head emerges into the light, and so is in color, albeit still like a two-dimensional cutout puppet. She tries to revive him with a metal tube inserted into his mouth. They lie in a tangle of twisted flexible metal tubing, as if in a crash scene. A conversation bubble, comic strip style, seems to come from her, "Please stay calm and focus." A briefcase stands to the side. Another man lies on the ground in shadow, only his head and an arm flung over his head in color.

Is there a transformational logic to the reappearance of the male-female in different configurations, perhaps involving oneiric primary processes or secondary revisions? Clearly it is dreamwork acknowledging erotic and nonviolent desire (the bent rifle barrels making connection rather than death). Yet deathly shadows are all around, out of the spotlight, under the bus, from the smokestacks and gas heaters, everything and everyone connected by a chaos of metal tubing. Still, it is a Tin Man world more than a *Metropolis* one.

Or is the image one of rescuing the battered Indonesian people for a world of spiritual strength (*sákti*) and love that overcomes all corruption, dictatorship, and internal politically or religiously inspired strife? A rescue van, signaled by little Batmen everywhere.

This would make the words "why so hard to love" and "other dream: I love you too much" take on another level of meaning, one directed to the chaos of Indonesian society. As Wiharso says in his curatorial comments about his 2013 Venice Biennale installation, *The Indonesian: No Time to Hide:* "It features a large gate covered with reliefs referencing the Borobudur Temple, but depicting contemporary life. 'Keep our dreams alive' and 'Your perception is not my reality' are the two sentences appearing on the entrance gates. The sculptures around a meeting table outside the fortress have distorted faces of the country's past and present presidents, which refer to perception versus reality, and to how negative notions of the country are countered by the inner strength of its citizens who stand tall, a feat of *sákti*."[17] In the *Trilogy* catalog, he connects the dots: "This installation is a call to face history, to take ownership for the past, and recognize that not only have we done good as a nation and as individuals, but we have also made terrible mistakes. Now is the time to look at the past with clear eyes and from many perspec-

tives" (Wiharso 2014, 24). And again, referring to a piece called *Temple of Hope Hit by a Bus* (2011): "Two things in this work stand out—one is that a corner of the structure is damaged by a bus, depicting a collision of ideas and beliefs, and the other is that the structure is still strong" (2014: 227).

Volkswagens (literally, people's wagons, the Indonesian populace) are followed by the American car, titled *Behind American Dreams* No. 1 (red car) and *Behind American Dreams* No. 2 (blue car) (2012–15). The red car with a white top is stopped in the midst of another kind of set piece, a domestic tussle (plate 10). Two boys, one spike haired and one with mouse ears on his head, squabble at the car door, the one holding a spewing tube in the face of the other, who in turn holds a pink flower. A man in the car has a conversation balloon, "What's Going On?" A woman in a red bathing suit, with a flaming red flower shooting from her eye, pulls at one of the boys. His elongated intestine or umbilical cord arm stretches out past her to reach the arm of his mother, floating above in a white dress. Her head is flung back as if dead, and her other hand holds a red flower or flame in its palm of peace. A male figure floats down with tongue extended over the car's hood. Another paternal head watches from behind some columns.

In the metallic chaos below, there is a battery-like box and a seated skeletal figure wearing briefs and boots and leaning up against a crate, like a robot out of power. Wiharso says, "Images of humans turning into machines, or with machines parts, describe the effects of technology: how devices are merging with our bodies and how our environment is filled with electromagnetic energy constantly sending messages to our neurological systems. Unconsciously, the human body has become a mediator/conductor for electromagnetic energy to disseminate signals or information. In these depictions, I often visualize humans with robot arms or with brains full of cables or bodies made up of machines."

Nearby, another metallic figure lies on his back, right arm held out with a crab claw instead of a hand. Another figure lies on his back on the ground near the other end of the car. And two metallic figures converse behind the car, one with a very long arm and clawlike hand, reaching over the roof toward a metal man climbing out the left front door's window.

Is this indeed a crash scene, with the metal man climbing out a casualty, as are the floating parents, while the hysterical mother pulls at the boys squabbling over whatever just happened (between them, or maybe the cause of the accident)? Are all the male and female adult figures transforms of one another, or is there a wider allegory beyond family drama?

There is no visible damage to the car, and the scene could as easily be one of rescue, perseverance, and generational transfer of hope. The car, after all, is the aspiration of all young boys. The outstretched hand of the floating mother in a white dress and with a lotus flower offering in the palm of her hand might indicate the encouraging, supportive mother, while the mother in red is the protective mother concerned at any danger, firing maternal concern from her eye. The extended tongue of the floating father is his affection and paternal passing of the red car to his sons. From behind the columns, he also watches them practice their still-nascent sense of independence and ownership, practicing their developing powers of *sákti*.

The blue car with a white top (*Behind American Dream*, No. 2), which did not appear in the exhibition but is included in the catalog, seems a nightmare of not being able to save one's wife from a murderous attack in perhaps spreading violence and chaos. The driver in the right front seat shoots a revolver nonchalantly back behind the car, while looking ahead and smoking. He and all the characters, except the central flesh-colored couple in their underwear, are in silver-colored aluminum. The husband grabs his wife, who is falling backward. She reappears in the shadows below, bent backward over the gas stove or heater. The husband in Batman ears lies with his head next to hers and says absurdly, "Please make comfortable zona!!" Two more repetitions of him appear in these lower shadows, one on a wooden bed or stretcher, the other only his head with wires coming out of his neck (an image from earlier works titled *Don't Touch Me* or perhaps here an image of the electromagnetic currents that flow through Indonesia and the artist). His face also watches from behind the pillars, now at the rear of the car. Instead of the man behind the car reaching a hand to the man climbing out of the left front seat, the first tumbles over (shot?), and the second falls backward as if shot.

The visual vocabulary unit *The Other Dream: I Love You Too Much* (2011–15) hangs as a separate piece amid the bus, car, and truck series. Made of aluminum, car paint, color pigment, and resin, the prone couple making love is a repetitive element in many of Wiharso's works. Here it is in color, the wife in a white dress, the man in white trousers, attached to each other with leaking metal tubing plugged into an archaic furnace or gas heater, smoke coming both out of the heater's exhaust and from the tubing along the way. Love overcomes environmental issues? Or just the heat of passion?

Finally in this series comes an eggplant-colored pickup truck with Rhode Island license plates, with a yellow cabin, and loaded with people in the open

back load box (plate 11). A hooded Batman is driving, and a man in a blue jacket rides next to him. In the back are four boys, three women, and a Batman holding a small machine gun. A skeleton leans up against their luggage (gunnysacks tied with rope). And high above the truck on a stand, like an old sound system projecting visuals and music at a rock concert, is a TV monitor that shows possible destinations on a looping rotation. The gunnysacks indicate that the scene might be one of migrants. The TV projects fantasy destinations: a beach and swimming pool, a New England pond in the woods in spring and fall. It is also Wiharso's family migrating seasonally between Indonesia (overcrowded truck) and Rhode Island (rural quiet). Each destination, however, has a stylized skeleton in the middle of the image, like an elegant Giacometti, but no doubt symbolizing the inability to escape memories and difficulties. One carries one's worlds along wherever one goes.

Smart's *Exquisite Pirate (Octopus Rauberromantik)* beckons us to turn the corner. It is a soft sculpture puppet reminiscent of the pirate sentinel in the anteroom, in similar colors. It has a red wool cap. A black parrot sits on its left shoulder, which also sports an officer's coiled shoulder braid in blue; a signal flag on the other shoulder has a black upper corner and three stripes of red, from dark red mottled batik to bright red and pink. The mottled dark red batik with black rectangles continues as a wide cummerbund. A rust-red batik sleeve covers the left arm, looking like tattoos, and a hand is placed jauntily on a hip. White pantaloons fall over ragged black spindly leg-tentacles, looking not unlike the endings of the legs of Wiharso's wayang puppets in the anteroom. Counting the Ganesh elephant trunk-like tentacle from the face, the four leg tentacles, two arms (one hidden), the blue braid-tentacle, and perhaps a black one next to it, one can make out four pairs of tentacles that constitute the octopus of the title.

A brilliant Dada/cubist style variant of this collage is *The Exquisite Pirate (Rauberromantik/octo/flag)*, also from 2008. The parrot and flag are on the left shoulder together; the exposed arm is on the right and holds a rifle. A conically wrapped paper coolie hat-turban indicates the head, and the cummerbund is more skirtlike in its shape, position, and polka dot pattern. As with the sentinel pirate in the anteroom, a nice touch is the color chart by the side.[18]

Smart has produced a rich array of *Exquisite Pirate* collages, with wide-ranging references (nicely described by Melissa Miles in Smart 2009a; see also Miles 2006, 2007), from Eugène Delacroix to Kathy Acker, and from Sepik River masks to contemporary political puppets, many of which echo

Wiharso's concerns with migration and border crossing.[19] Miles writes that the *Exquisite Pirate* project was "conceived in 2003 in the context of heated debates about the plight of the Tampa refugees, and developed during a period dominated by anxieties over immigration, border protection, battles between Greenpeace and Japanese whalers on the high seas, international military invasions and the continued plundering of natural environments and resources."[20]

The *Exquisite Pirate (Octopus Rauberromantik)* points us ahead to the *Pedagogical Puppet*, *Ballet Russe Dada*, and *Artists' Dolls* in the next section of *Conversation: Endless Acts in Human History*. But as one turns the corner, there is also a transition piece by Wiharso, a nod toward Smart's textile and string work, called *Art History: Indonesian Diaspora* (ballpoint, car paint on linen, 2015), done during his residency at the Singapore Tyler Print Institute. It is a set of four panels, like windows, or rather window shades drawn down to different heights, that could open into his wonderful and very different explorations at the Singapore Tyler Print Institute with paper and its absorption of colored string and car paint (Wiharso 2015c).[21] *Diaspora*, Wiharso suggests, is also a new term for Indonesians to think with.[22]

"CUT SO THE WORLD DOESN'T STAY THE SAME"

A wall-sized blackboard, filled with chalk writing, photographs, cutout collages, and strings making connections, presents a view into Smart's artistic processes and inspirational precursors (plate 17). It mimes her studio process of pinning things up on walls, making notes, rearranging, and drawing lines and connections, sometimes with chalk, sometimes with string. The blackboard changes not only in the studio but also in different shows and in the catalogs (Smart 2010, 2016, n.d. a, n.d. b).[23] At the National Gallery show, three found photographs of costumed manikins (and people) hanging from a bar provide a nod to Wiharso's hung-up wayang puppets. In the catalog there are different versions, some doing more with dance figures, some more with the use of scissors; elements are placed differently. The effect is to make the variants dance, to provide a fourth dimensionality, to allow the structural potentials to go through open and context-adjusted permutations. Even a video or film would be hard-pressed to achieve *this* effect.

The eye and brain are quickly inducted into a modernist tradition of dance, textiles, photomontage, and cutouts of Hanna Höch, Sonia Delaunay, Lyubov Popova, and Sophie Taeuber.[24] A genealogical or thought diagram in

the upper left includes concept words and key names: "*notation*" (of dance choreography) has a chalk line to dance notation innovator (Rudolf) "Laban" and philosopher (Rudolf) Steiner, with one back up to (Joseph) Beuys; "*performance*" has a chalk arrow up to "The House of the Body" and down to wayang kulit, *da-lang* (*dhalang*), and *ada biasa menari* ("no ordinary dancing").

The Politics of Cutting has a line down to Hannah Höch, with "shadow" floating alongside, and on down to "feminism" and "Dada" and back over to "Laban." A fourth high-level chalk-circled word, "technique," with "gesture" to the side, has a chalk line down to "words," "contraction," "release," "spiral," and, at an angle, "Martha Graham." More text is partially covered over by the three photographs, but peeking out along the sides are some obvious descriptions of the textile arts: "stitches show raw cuts, paraded around, lining up, the patching conspicuous, drawing you towards it without an apology as if you are meant to be part of this conspiracy proceeding in a way you did not count on in a way you could never understand." *The Pedagogical Puppet* is another middle-high term with a descent line to *The Choreography of Cutting*. All three of these italicized terms are overlapping alternating titles of Smart's projects.

Two Dada/constructivist female dress mock-ups are in the center of the board. Between them, under the title "The Choreography of Cutting," one can read, "how do you cut then? how do you nail the movement at the . . . or choreograph this movement caught midpoint?" A video screen, with scissors cutting a circular disk, overlays a quote from Maria Tumarkin's poem written for Smart, "Instructions for Cutting and Tearing": "Cut to lay bare / Cut to stop the memory from fading / Cut so the world doesn't stay the same."[25] The larger dress mock-up (directly below the words "wayang kulit," "dhalang," and "no ordinary dance") has a head made of an irregular round white cloth on which hands with scissors perform a shadow dance. Out of the mock-up's left sleeve emerges a short-cropped, bowing head and two upturned hands in a position of offering. From the right sleeve comes another hand, which clasps, in dancing-together position, a hand emerging from the right hip pocket. Nearby in chalk is written, "show the wound, who said this?" By the left shoulder is written, "my left-hand dance, blind dance, and step, choreography, Punk Bones." And half erased, barely visible, "Hysterical spring, pastoral dance, Appalachian Spring." Aaron Copeland and Martha Graham were the composer and dancer of the ballet *Appalachian Spring*. Next to the left hip is a rhythmic patter labeled "Gertrude Stein on

Isadora Duncan: Orta or One Dancing": "one. She was that one, and being that one. Feeling in believing completing being existing and being one. Feeling in naming existing and being one being one being of that kind of them and they being one dancing being existing and her being one not being."[26]

The bare feet of the mock-up are doing a dance step and seem, cubist style, to be facing in the opposite direction of the body. "Cut so the world doesn't stay the same," it says on one side of the dancing feet; on the other side, the names "Gertrude Stein . . . a portrait of Isadora Duncan." Photographs of Isadora Duncan in fact appear on a wall later in the show near Smart's *World Garden*.

A seated figure in seamstress-style markings is to the side along with notations (for sewing, for dance). Upward, above (again from Maria Tumarkin), is the verse "to cut—to cut out, to cut away, cross-cut," along with three seamstress chalk circles crosscut by a vertical line, and the title "The pedagogical puppet instructions for cutting and tearing." An instruction says, "[Put the] poem text [here]." There are more circular, multiply crosscut chalk circles.

In the catalog there are more mock-ups and cutout collages from seamstress, fashion, and dance sources: more names of dancers/performance artists, videos of dancers, and key feminage phrases. These include Hijikata Tatsumi (dancer, performance artist), Ballets Russe (costumes), Pina Bausch (visceral dance), Kurt Joss and his ballet *The Green Room: A Dance of Death in Eight Scenes* (1932, the first to be fully notated in Labanotation), Bauhaus, Oskar Schlemmer, (Paul) Klee, K(urt) Schwitters, Pussy Riot, and Georges Méliès; video titles such as *Pedagogical Puppet Instructions for Cutting and Tearing* (a seven-minute video); as well as such phrases from performance, puppetry, and cutting (*pertunjukan*, "show, performance, recital, exhibition"; "transformation puppets," "radical puppets," "delicate cutting," "self-cutting"). More important are some of the variant images and variant quotations. The bowing dancer, for instance, is in color and rotated so his purple head faces us, and he is placed within a mechanical and geometric assemblage, next to two or three dancers. The Gertrude Stein quote appears in at least three variants, one that stresses the dancing, one that stresses oneness, and one that stresses being.

In one version of the blackboard, a woman raises her dress to show off the bruises on her thighs. The words in chalk around her are "glitch," "stop the smooth," "disrupt creates," "flow of history," "stare at the seam," "rip it up/cut it off/rend asunder—Rosetta Br."—as if the stuttering words simulta-

neously invoke the psychological pain of self-cutting, the artist Smart's effort to restitch history, and the instruction set to a seamstress.

In the variant of the blackboard installed at the Postmasters Gallery in New York in February–March 2016, there were abstract geometric mobiles in the shape of female puppet dolls, hanging by string on the left side of the board, and, instead of the manikin cutouts, an exquisitely woven kimono-like piece. Varied but equally exquisite kimonos, as if having danced off the blackboard, were pinned onto the surrounding walls, making the installation, as they say in Southeast Asia, same/different.

In Jakarta, when one proceeded into the next room, there were two sets of hangings, a collection of Smart's Dada dolls and Wiharso's *Self Portrait* (digital print, laser-cut plexiglass, thread, acrylic vinyl sleeve, and eight panels of 128 images, each showing pictures of events that have made up the times of his life).

Smart's elegant *Die Dada Puppen* (1996) and Artists Dolls (2012, 2015), made of geometric shapes and colored cloth, dance on strings from the ceiling, casting shadows on the wall (plate 16). One holds up a curved arm over her head in ballet dancer's position, a circle over her head, horizontal bar neck, horizontal bar shoulders from which hang articulated arms like Wiharso's wayang, with a black and white skirt. Another bright, cheery ostrich dancer has a black circle head, white and red circles as a neck, wood-handled sheer cloth feather duster as a shoulder neck and tail, yellow semicircle pelvis, and two long delicate ballet legs *en point*. Six distinctive dancers make up the dada troupe. A very different but striking manikin is included in the catalog, called doing the "Jig": it has an arm showing off its muscles with clenched fist, across a mirror-neck a silhouette male head. It wears a blue kamarband over a red sarong, one blue and one gray stocking, and heavy brown shoes, a mix of Japanese, Javanese, and Irish.

These kinetic collages are complemented around the corner by wall-hanging collages of female *Exquisite Pirates*. One, bare breasted, with folded arms, a long black mustache, and a stern cubist face, is, however, from the navel down, clad in a bikini and womanly (plate 18). A redhead with a black eye patch and large earring sits like a man with legs apart and hands stuck in her shorts. A femme pirate in a dress, legs demurely crossed and hands primly on knees, has a fabulous cubist or King of Spades head with a black hat adorned with a Jolly Roger skull and crossbones, a black patch on one eye, a staring melancholy right eye, and a third eye with a black parrot as the pupil, or perhaps those last two eyes belong to an owl perched on her right shoulder.

The demons or dogs of desire, with their eyes, tongues, and penises extended through the bars, are held at bay by Wiharso's large iron fence (500 by 200 centimeters). The piece, called *Chronic Satanic Privacy*, is a popular and laughter-inducing piece (plate 13). Young women in hijab get their pictures taken standing with the silver-and-black figures (spotted like a Dalmatian dog or striped like a zebra[27]), whose erect penises have red light bulbs on their ends. Wiharso says the piece is about tolerance: "The fence represents a code of ethics. Breaking down morality is another thing, but we should not break the ethical code. When that border is breached, people will be like animals. Maybe worse, because animals use violence to survive, while humans use it for their pleasure" (quoted in Setiawati 2016a). Indeed, he used this piece to talk to a journalist about the bombings, saying, "Personally, I feel afraid, but I will not get trapped in that fear. We have to stand up to show that we have hopes, expectations and dreams that we try to build" (quoted in Setiawati 2016b).

Nearby, forming a second open wall at right angles, is a striking post-colonial sculptural set called *A Thousand KM* (2014–15) (plate 12). A couple in formal Indonesian dress (silvered but with flesh-colored faces) stand sovereignly facing each other. The man holds a kris in his left hand and an umbrella in his right hand; the wife, with a dagger ornament through her hair, which is piled up on her head, holds a sword in her right hand and holds her left regally across her waist. On a chair sitting watching them is a man in tropical whites with an industrial metal head. The severed head of Daendels, in a wide-brimmed hat, lies on the ground, eyes open. The title for Indonesians should be an obvious reference, as Wiharso explains: "This is talking about the 1000 km road, built by [Governor-General Herman Willem] Daendels from Anyer in [the] western end to Panarukan in [the] eastern end of Java. People forget the past, but I'm still remembering, always when using that road. . . . and I question, again, the prejudice and where the prejudice comes from, because . . . people remember unconsciously . . . [it is] about identity, . . . still has a stigma from the past" (January 14, 2016).[28] The Jalan Raya Pos (Great Post Road) was built by Daendels (1808–11) with Indonesian forced labor as a military road for the transfer of soldiers to protect against the British invasion under Stamford Raffles (1811–14). It now is part of the highway from the port of Merak in the west (which in Sumatra connects to the southern end of the Trans-Sumatran Highway) to Banyuwangi port in the east (at the Bali Strait).

Looking through *A Thousand KM* to the back wall, one sees a large (300-by-700-centimeter), three-panel metal cutout called *Sound of Garden: Delicate Machine* (2015; plate 14). Here in silvered aluminum we have a bamboo grove, repeating the theme of the bamboo in the entry to the show. There is a half-hidden metal man slipping in between the bamboo. There are animals in naturalistic color at the base, albeit one is a horselike creature with, instead of a head, a long trunk wrapped under it, and the other is a weaselike dog inspecting a detached hand. The main figures, husband and wife, are in the foreground of the robust man with four eyes and a wide grin. He has two kneeling figures on his shoulders facing away, one gesturing "Say no evil," the other "See no evil." The wife steps toward the bamboo grove and has three protective male figures above her (one with Batman ears, one with horns, and one fused with the flank of a winged Pegasus).

The panel to the left features the four-eyed grinning man's head and torso in a Buddhist pose, holding worry beads in his right hand (his wrist sporting a digital wristwatch) and a flame in the palm of his left hand; the smoke of meditative visualization is coming out of the top of his head.[29] Cut into his forehead a couple sits at a table with a white tablecloth, only one plate and one knife and fork (in the middle between them), a flower vase, and an ice bucket. The grinning four-eyed man wears headphones. His arms are tattooed: on his right arm with three human heads, on his left arm with a skull and crossbones; a detached hand, foot, and leg; a boy watching a television; and a ghostly face behind. To the left of his head, a dog, a bird, and two lotus flowers are in boxes. And above his left side is the footed bathtub with a floating flesh-colored man inhaling through a pipe, a flesh-colored hand at his feet holding a vine, and a chimney puffing smoke behind. A silver woman with hair piled in a double topknot floats nearby. A metal ladder in front of his chest frames a white, elongated organ (a heart or a lotus root) with veins or tendrils. A framed portrait of a boy in shirt and tie is above his waist on his left, and there is a slightly larger empty frame on his right, in front of which sits a white cat. A showerhead below his left breast pours out gray-blue liquid into a rectangular tub at the base, on the edge of which a silvered tiny woman sits holding a fish, and a flesh-colored man at the other end pulls on a rope attached to the ring on which hangs the elongated organ. The woman in white, much smaller than the man, stands behind his left shoulder. A smaller silvered woman floats by her with her flesh-colored arm around the shoulder of the white woman (whose hand is silvered in complementary contrast): a pipe connects the two and leads to the gray-blue water in the tub

below. A silver woman and a man in a cape (on which a cat descends) float by the central male figure's right shoulder.

The third panel to the right features the four-eyed grinning man. At times Wiharso has identified with this four-eyed man, representing a double identity. At other times he talks of multiple eyes as signs of increased watchfulness. And at other times he speaks of the multiple eyes of the ten-faced (Dasamuka) Ravana in the *Ramayana*, which he says "possesses superpower because it can change its face to fool its enemies and lovers." Here it is standing bare chested with a silvered window cut into the chest in which there seem to be two figures. A horned humanoid head licks at his left ear. To his left is his wife in white, surrounded by two small horned humanoid figures and two boys, one in a cape. To the man's right is a silver-caped man holding a flower or flame in his palm, with two small horned and caped men holding onto his legs. Above float two (incense) boxes, one on wheels, the other with a prone man with his head on the lap of a kneeling woman. There are three thought bubbles.

On a side wall to the left of that piece is another strong metal artwork, *Coalition: Never Say No*. The nude male and female couple kiss by uniting their tongues; their hearts seem also connected (plate 15). One sees into their mechanical aquamarine interiors. On the man's arm, a tattoo reads, "Dispose of Hatred and Give Your Love to Defeat Your Enemy." The grammar of their interiors, and smaller figures surrounding them, is mysterious, but the male carries a boy's head in his belly, a masked figure in his heart with a flame approaching it, and a tattoo on his hip of a shades-wearing boy with a missing foot. The woman has a boy's head near her throat or chest. So they carry their children protectively inside themselves. Her heart is like a ship's navigation wheel and is attached with pneumatic tubing to her intestines, which seem to be evacuating a brown millipede, and one of her two legs ends in a truncated foot spilling out elongated bones, at least one of which ends in a crab claw emitting a flame. The right foot has a blue shoe, as does her left foot, which is atop a headless blue human figure stepping high with a bent right knee and a small flame nearby. An open crab claw points at the blue shoe and human form and is attached via rubber or metal tubing that snakes around the male, ending in a larger claw or clamp on an elaborate nozzle. Smaller protective figures surround the couple: above the man's shoulder, a woman in a blue dress is kissed on her knee by a head. By the side of the central female, a slightly larger version of the woman in a blue dress, facing outward, holds a kris in her left hand, while her right hand is lifted to her brow.

A red flame shoots from the back of the central female's head, and a cage with an upside-down head is attached to her neck. Two more heads float below the woman in a blue dress and above the truncated foot, one in blue and one flesh colored. Whatever the symbolic grammar, the overall impression is one of inwardness (all the figures and heads have closed eyes), protectiveness, and calm, perhaps united, in coalition, against the black background world outside.

Two small glass carvings on the wall to the right, titled *Immune* (2014–15), have a domestic scene (a father and son, with wife and Batman in the background) or a scene of love set within a tuberous vine. The effect is cooling after the hot intensity of the metal works, immune to the oppressions, prejudices, and violence of the world.

One more stunning, but flat, cutout metal piece provides both a more domestic and civic scene and a resonance with Smart's textile works. Almost hidden behind Wiharso's *Self Portrait* in the room with Smart's dancing Dada puppets is *Being Guest Double Happiness* (200 by 300 centimeters, 2015). Its largest figure is a seated Dutch woman making lace. She is perhaps partly doubled at the top of the piece by an Indonesian woman with a long braid weaving, below whom is a three-eyed, two-nosed grinning face, with a conversation bubble above it saying, "Please Stay Calm"; below the face, there are two more bubbles: "What's Going On in this World" and "Don't Confuse your Ethics." To the right of this is an upright skeleton stepping out of his skin, and below all this a man facedown on his arms on a small wooden platform dreaming the entire scene. His head is a conversation bubble, which pleads, "I Want to Know What Happens Now." Don't we all.

The eye is drawn back to the Dutch lace maker, and indeed the whole intricate cutout at one level seems like the lace she is making. We see her making a small piece on her loom, but she is enveloped in a machinic environment of many spoked wheels or gears or cosmic circles, with many warp beams, treadles, wood bars, and shed regulators. She seems placed on a large circular dais, itself an open meshwork of wood or straw basket weaving. And to her right three men stand like Buddhist monks in front of the spoked wheels, gears, or cosmic circles in conversation. The speaker wears a T-shirt partly covered perhaps by a monk's cloak; the other two men wear high-necked batik shirts. The speaker's conversation bubble says, "I don't want to go your way which is very hypocritical."

Across the fence of *Chronic Satanic Privacy*, one can make out Smart's *World Garden* (2015; synthetic polymer paint on canvas with collage elements, 300 by 540 centimeters; made up of three canvases, each 300 by 180 centimeters). It is a piece she made in Wiharso's Black Goat Studio, an anchor piece for the show and a new view. It replies to the title of Wiharso's *Sound of Garden* and to his forest borders by finding an interior clearing of falling leaves that fills the canvas. In my mind's eye, it evokes the Australian Aborigine paintings of Gloria Petyarre's *Bush Medicine Leaves* series (done over the last twenty years of her career; she died in 2021). As with Petyarre's leaves, Smart's *World Garden* is a new departure in technique and subject. Petyarre was switching from batik to canvas, and Smart was responding to the new environment of the Black Goat Studio. The raised pavilion of the studio lacked walls to pin up her work in progress, as was her practice. Instead, there were three walls of glass looking out into the garden and fields beyond: "I wrapped fine white fabric around the inner columns of the space to work from both sides, and have responded to the shadows and the movement in the hanging elements—composing figures, and fragments of metal and fabric in a more abstracted way." Amid its falling leaves and other fragments, there is a defiant figure of a woman, wrapped in black hijab (a chador or burka). And like the fence across the way, it, too, attracted young Indonesian women in their hijab headscarves to have their pictures taken with this figure.

On the wall next to *World Garden* is a fabric cutout tree, one of Smart's *Family Tree House (Shadows and Symptoms)* (1999–2003) series. Like the pirate ships, this first attracts the eye as a black silhouette; as one moves closer, one begins to see bits of red and blue color in the trees, and a red stain at the foot of one tree, and birds and other things in the trees. It is, says Smart, a family tree, the tree of knowledge, the tree of life, including the murderous secrets of the bloody stain at the foot of one tree. The original in felt and fabric was eleven meters high, pinned to a wall, and recently has been reimagined as a public artwork in painted steel, twelve by nineteen meters, at the edge of Buluk Park in Melbourne, titled *Shadow Trees* (2014).

It, too, replies to Wiharso's *Delicate Machine* (2015). A picture of the public artwork in Melbourne is brilliantly juxtaposed in the *Conversations: Endless Acts in Human History* catalog (Wiharso and Smart 2016a). With

Wiharso's *Delicate Machine*, a lacework cutout in which his signature figures sit around a table on a Persian carpet, it portrays the cutout sides of the *Temple of Hope* on which boys play and dance. A couple embraces in the corner. Wiharso's head is below, dreaming. A palm tree waves gently over the peaceful scene. The catalog also nicely juxtaposes an image of one of Wiharso's *Being Guest: Double Happiness* (2015) pieces with the original *Family Tree House (Shadows and Symptoms)* (2002) in the National Gallery of Australia (Smart 2010).[30]

PRIMAL SCENES: CUTTING, TABLES FOR EATING AND DISCUSSION, BREAKING WALLS

The final set of installations are, in a way, foundational to the entire show, each in its own womblike room.

Womb One: *Pedagogical Puppet Instructions for Cutting and Tearing* is the video we have been working up to from the blackboard in the main exhibition hall, the result of Smart's residency at the University of Connecticut, and again on exhibit in the Postmasters Gallery (plate 20). Already advertised on the blackboard in the main exhibition hall, it is a seven-minute, single-channel video combining shadow puppetry with chalkboard drawing and a reading from a text by Melbourne-based writer and cultural historian Maria Tumarkin. Smart says it was commissioned to focus on cutting and, "in particular, my interest in the neurosis described as 'delicate cutting,'" something she had dealt with explicitly in her 1996 exhibition of paintings, *Delicate Cutting*, which dealt with scarification and cutting of the female body. The cutting here is sonic in Tumarkin's poem, read in part as a voice-over, and visual in a shadow-play dance, reminding me of William Kentridge's video work and Kara Walker's cutouts. At the University of Connecticut, among the people Smart worked with, and credited in the video as the artistic puppet director, was John Bell, a leading figure in puppetry and a *dhalang* of the Bread and Puppet group and the Honk! Festival of marching bands held annually in October around Davis Square, Somerville, Massachusetts (Bell 2001).

Smart's hand appears to write the title and draw chalk circles and lines on the blackboard. Silhouettes appear of two puppeteers, male and female, holding two shadow marionettes on strings from wood holders. As in a dance, the marionettes have their foreheads together, then pull apart as if to

begin the dance, but a female shadow figure rises up. Cut. Return to Smart's hand drawing three vertical lines and three circles. A female shadow puppet strikes a dramatic dance pose on the right, the shadows doubling her hands to four, and a third leg. On the left, shadow hands clap. Cut. Smart draws more circles, indicating the direction of the turn with arrows, and then an ellipse containing a sawtooth graph shape crossing an elliptical curve, with more directional arrows. The shadow puppet on the right rushes left with open scissors, attacking a film strip held by the shadow puppet on the left. Scissors, held aloft now by two women, attack each other in a twirling fight dance. Cut. More circles with lines cut through them. A grand abstract shadow dance of two female black-gloved hands, scissors held by a hand. Multiple women attack, retreat, cut and turn, pairs of hands, gloves hanging down delicately from their arms like ballerina legs.

The texts read in the soundtrack are excerpts from the long poem written by Tumarkin for this artwork:

> Male, female and the fusion of the two.
> The shape of each human being was completely round,
> Back and sides in a circle.
> Four hands each, and as many legs as hands . . .
>
> . . .
>
> Each one of us, then, is a half of a human whole.
> Each one of us, once, was sliced like a flatfish.
>
> . . .
>
> Cut to lay grief bare.
> Cut to stop memory fading.
> Cut so the world doesn't dare stay the same.
>
> . . .
>
> "I cut," said Princess Diana.
> "I cut my arms and my legs."
> 200 million people watched her
> Say, "I cut" in 1995.
>
> . . .
>
> Cut to become whole.
> Cut because we are arranged by loss.
> *Cut so the world doesn't dare stay the same.*

Womb Two: *Feast Table: Being Guest* (2014–15). A huge koi or carp with a red-and-white head and tail sits on a table, its rib cage and backbone exposed, out of which come the bones of a large, strange creature with eye and tusks (plate 21). Three figures dressed in steampunk mechanical spacesuit-like garb sit around the table, connected with multiple tubes to the fish. One of the three has collapsed with his head on the table. Multiple versions and variations of this koi and table have been produced by Wiharso, often with the body intact but multiple fishhooks or arrows stuck into the fish, a large tongue coming out, or an open mouth and a small humanoid skeleton hanging inside. The table often sits on a Persian carpet, and often the figures around it are two standing figures, one pointing at the fish, or one offering the fish and the other refusing it. Sometimes the table is a large wooden colonial table, and the spots of the fish contaminate the men.

Only after many years, Wiharso says, did he realize the table comes from the *warang* (street food stall) that his parents operated. The *warang* table is where people sit, talk, and eat; where politics, family matters, injustices, and everything else are discussed. It is the demotic version of Immanuel Kant's *Tischgesellschaft* (food and conversation as the foundation of civics), a good place for the wisdom of Semar, the wise comic of the wayang plays.

Womb Three. In the final far corner of the show is a video of Wiharso with mallet and chisel hammering away, trying to widen a small hole in a brick wall through which one sees a party of people who, hilariously and troublingly, pay no attention to the hammering. Insofar as Wiharso is attempting to tear down walls of oppression and discrimination, the obliviousness or studied failure to hear is troubling. Perhaps we are the ones on the other side, and more benignly are waiting in the Green Room for the walk-through to begin again. Wiharso's Sisyphean, obsessive repetition, like a Möbius strip, returns us to the beginning of the show, so we can walk through again, reflecting, conversing anew with the visual vocabularies gained on the first walk-through, realizing that there is much more to see and tell.

The epic begins anew, endless acts, like the buzzing conversations in Wiharso's pipes and vines connecting and disseminating: "The Javanese save information garnered from friends, parents, the government, religious leaders, and traditional leaders and so on in their minds. They pass on the information verbally, and this is an aspect of mythology that I also explore in my mythology." *The instructions are clear*, Maria Tumarkin recites:

When mourning a parent
Tear on the left side
For all others,
Tear on the right side.

. . .

Cut to become whole . . .
Cut so the world doesn't dare stay the same.
Connect-i-cut.

4

Nomadic Video in Turbulent Sea States

How Art Becomes Critique

I devised a strategy for my work where instead of trying to come out with a position, like a political position, what I did was execute a gesture. A very neutral gesture, through which these situations expand. — CHARLES LIM YI YONG, INTERVIEW IN "SAND AND SEA"

Critique is not criticism, nor is it just evaluation with respect to logic or particular norms. It is also a *nomadic curiosity*; a poking about; an uncovering of what once was kept quiet, things known but not public currency; a moving of debris out of the way to show what was covered over sometimes with reason, sometimes simply by the loss of salience. It is a redrawing of the everyday political in the sense of a renewed *partitioning of the sensible* for the present.[1] Rather than attacking, it rearranges and makes what once seemed taboo or blocked (in an earlier time) no longer so, or clears away self-protective evasions for earlier purposes that no longer apply. *It's not that I forgot, rather I chose not to mention* (Lim 2008), but now that you mention it, it's okay to do so, since what once was diffidence, repression, discrimination, or status assertion seems nowadays hardly worth the effort or seems misaligned with new interests, and something good may come of simply not protesting at its mentioning or uncovering. Sensibilities change, sometimes easily, often not. But even when not, the distribution of sensibilities does not remain static.

Alternative mobile art platforms often help leverage such changing sensibilities and help confirm that times have changed, that *new discursive regimes* have come into being. Common sense, the sensus communis, is altered. In nonliberal societies, such artwork projects and platforms are *necessary stages for* conversation about such *ongoing processes*. In liberal societies (where politically correct speech, mass media repetition, and swings of popular opinion also constrain the public sphere), they are as well, providing spaces for thought and the play of contrary positions in a relatively safe space. The evolution of *artistic vocabularies*, over the course of multiyear artworks and artists' lifetimes, is among the relays of such cat-and-mouse emergences, in different public arenas, of new distributions of sensibilities, everyday politics, common sense, and public stakes, as well as poetics and imaginaries.

Charles Lim Yi Yong's artistic vocabulary provides a particularly rich example of how art becomes open-ended, restless critique while also, as he puts it, finding poetic entry, destroying initial concepts, and finding other concepts inside to emerge and push the artwork forward. He creates an engaged sensibility as items shift from sea state to sea state, often acting as bridges from one focus of attention to the next, or returning to earlier ones. I begin, as does Lim in his exhibitions and reflections, with a swimming-pool metaphor (his 2008 Manifesta 7 video installation) and the relation between the virtual and material internet as an analogy with the sea state(s) that follow.[2]

IT'S NOT THAT I FORGOT, RATHER I CHOSE NOT TO MENTION (MANIFESTA 7, 2008)

A man swims slowly in a shallow pool filled with leaves across the horizontal screen, his breaststroke sweeping leaves out of the way as he goes. He occasionally lifts his head and torso up from the water, then continues the length of the lane, turning left (vertically on the screen) and swimming back in the next adjacent lane. The light green of the pool's bottom with black lane markings emerges from under the dark green leaves, as if the swimmer were a cleaning machine. He swims back and forth, in and out of the screen's view, until the bottom of the pool is largely revealed.

The tropical, says one interpretation on Lim's website, is a state of flux and extremes. "It demands renewal and replacement, erasure as a simultaneous resistance to and acceptance of the forces that create it. . . . Singapore, with its impressive urban edifice, strives to deepen this imagination of the

entropic forces that compel and overwhelm it. It reclaims and recreates—this is the paramount expression of its will. . . . Human agency harbours the power to conquer its environment, to dominate it entirely, if only for a moment" (https://www.seastate.sg/). Or as the Manifesta 7 website puts it: "In a highly developed tropical island city, the built environment is systematically cleaned and replaced as a way of resisting the tropical forces of decay and parasitic growth. . . . This system of sterilization encourages the fear of the "ghost" – anything that suggests any other histories. There is a formidable presence that cannot be forgotten and cannot be mentioned, Lim's films of decay and sterilization seek to probe and test this presence" (http://www.manifesta7.it/artists/384).

LEARNING FROM FAILURES: *TSUNAMI.NET*

One day in 1999 the internet failed: it went dark. It was said a tsunami near Taiwan had broken the undersea fiber optic cable that connected Singapore. The severing of a cable under the sea is not common for a variety of reasons.[3] Cable companies have specialized vessels to repair them. It is a somewhat expert task to get the cables repaired with just enough flexibility and tension so the cables can move but not break. Back then, there was only one cable. Today there are many, so one severed cable should not interrupt the information flow. Still, in 2006 there was a "cyber-tsunami" caused by a series of earthquakes that severed several cables near Taiwan, triggering regional outages, and it took several days to remedy (Schneider 2007).

The break that day in 1999 provided a critical spark for an artistic project: how to make the internet visible, to make the experientially virtual reveal its materiality. To most people, normally, the internet is an invisible infrastructure, albeit one that is almost like the air we breathe or the water that keeps us hydrated. Normally it seems immaterial, not just invisible (aside from a few peripheral cables and wires and modems and routers), a flow of energy, photons, and electrons that we could not see directly even if we tried or thought about them. The artistic challenge was how to bring this very material but almost-invisible infrastructure to consciousness apperception. One might, of course, follow the cables, wires, and switches, or engage in a research project, or create a map of the ever-expanding global wiring and satellite networks. But the challenge, as the artist collective of the *tsunami.net* project saw it, was to use a man walking with an antenna on his back and a cell phone relaying his global positioning coordinates to a

satellite so he could be followed on four monitors. This would be a material metaphor of the material system that carries the internet. Lim would walk, with a server in his backpack, the five hundred kilometers from Kassel, the site of the art exposition of *documenta 11*, to Kiel, the site of the server that supported *documenta 11*, while curator Woon Tien Wei and scientist Melvin Phua would operate the monitors and oversee the support systems (the "web walker" software, pinging tracer program, mapping software, browser, and power supply).[4] It was a slow walk (thirty days) with people offering him food and encouragement along the way. *Tsunami.net* called the trek "alpha 3.4": three colleagues and four monitors, inscribing, as it were, the initial letter of making the internet materially visible without unearthing the cables and wires.

But this, too, they judged, like the internet outage, was a failure. The walking and tracking worked fine. What failed, they think, was the intelligibility of the artwork for audiences. Although one reviewer called it the only interesting internet art project that year, audiences generally, they think, either did not get it or could not do anything further with it. The metaphor did not grip, was not productive. People know that the internet involves material infrastructure, and yet it is experienced as invisible. It instantiates time-space compression into near instantaneity. Cell phones, monitors, televisions, and GPS are no different. Walking across different local jurisdictions did not really dramatize the geopolitics of the internet as advertised.

Lim says he learned from this project that a single installation cannot convey complex ideas and that what was needed was the *development over time* of an *artistic vocabulary*.[5] One of these "complex ideas" is that Singapore, as an island in a maritime milieu, has histories that should be told quite differently from those of continental Southeast Asia; underwater-cable histories can highlight one of these differences. Another complex idea is about technological failures, shifting attention from only celebrating finished engineering accomplishments to ongoing evaluations—of not just maintenance, repairs, and upgrades but also purposes, processes, and especially reparations to the displaced. A third complex idea is about transnational geopolitics intersecting with the affordances and foreclosures of our technological lives. To elaborate these three complex ideas, Lim began to work on what would become a fifteen-year project he called *SEA STATE* (2005–present). The name comes from the *nine sea states* in the mariners' code of turbulence, from untroubled waters to those buffeted by typhoons and storms.

The idea for *SEA STATE*, he says, began to gain contrast and definition at an artist's residency in Chiang Mai, Thailand, where he was surrounded by artists working with the imagery of the great river *nagas* (snakes, rivers). The Mekong, the Chayo Praya, and the Irrawaddy are formative physically and conceptually for the Southeast Asian landscape and cosmology. Their rhythm is to annually flood and deposit nutrient-rich silt. What, he mused, could be the equivalent of these river-fed basins for the quite different conceptual universe of archipelagic Southeast Asia? Archipelago and peninsula coasts do have smaller rivers, at whose mouths ports are found, and thalassocracies grow. But *thalassocracy* is a distinctive political form where control is exercised more over the *sea lanes* than the hinterland. The hinterland is left to local *datuks*, or headmen, who, like sea captains, used the ports as interfaces, places for commodity exchange. Harbormasters (*shabandars*, a Persian title) collected taxes on trade, which funded the thalassocratic rajas and sultans.

The Chiang Mai residency gave Lim a contrastive question. For me, it also represents a *probe* for *alternative or counterorganizational forms* to that of the commercial art market. This is a vital discussion among artists who have not yet made it into the monied art markets and whose discourses are very different from that of curators at big museums who try to create blockbuster shows or at least thematic shows to draw ticket purchases (see also the section "Yogyakarta: Prep Work" in chapter 3). The residency was organized as part of a mobile networked circuit of art residencies, a brainchild of the Thai curator Gridthiya Gaweewong, and the not-for-profit Project 304, as a means of helping artists keep in touch across countries and artists' communities and gain visibility where state support is not well distributed, a kind of bootstrapping for recognition and stimulation.[6]

In recent years Singapore has become exceptional in the region in offering state support for the arts, yet the dialectic between struggling artists and the state remains. This stems partly from the legacy of the political and Cold War security state of the 1960s–1980s, partly from competition for funding, partly from state fiduciary concerns over not spending public monies on those who bite the hand that feeds them. When the latter achieve international recognition, they often become valued icons of state recognition, both a recuperative move and a matter of the time for the adventurous artworks to become part of ordinary discourse. Thus, the state once banned performance art and forum theater but now celebrates both.[7] Such struggles also involve the freedom of those who get state funds versus state funders' efforts

to insist on constraints and conditions, which may have less to do with explicit politics but, for example, require the use of facilities provided in existing budgets, rather than further spending on a work or exhibit site that the artist might prefer.

Lim, for instance, would have liked to stage the 2016 retrospective of his work in a boat-repair shed near the former kampong of Somapah, where he grew up and where the sea is proximate (as a kind of site-specific exhibit), rather than in a facility with no connection to the sea but built by the state for art exhibits (the otherwise quite wonderful Nanyang Technical University's Center for Contemporary Art [NTU CCA] at Gillman Barracks, a repurposed site of former British army barracks). From perspective of the state funders, it may be merely a pragmatic issue, but for the artist it is a constraint on creating site-specific art or art that elevates consciousness about its conceptual references.[8] The retrospective was a bringing home of the state-sponsored pavilion exhibition at the 2015 Venice Biennale. Lim wryly notes, "The state has its agenda, and I have mine."[9]

Critique in Lim's artwork takes the form of a distinctive, slow, close reading or examination, rather than being aggressive or confrontational. It expands, marking out ever new sites and modes of inquiry. Critique here fosters a way of seeing, mainly by way of cameras but also via navigational charts, sandbox modeling, and other aides that can follow the invaginations of waterways (*all lines flow out*), look back from the sea to the land to watch an island grow and work its edges into new working landscapes, follow surveillance and obliterative views from spinning missiles, or follow the drilling machines that excavate ever deeper under the island, creating ever-deeper underground levels for storage and living.

The questions thus raised are not merely those of maintenance and repair, or destroying the old to build the new, nor just the two types of memory work—the problematic purchase of information systems on keeping track of their own legacy structures, and the unmooring of points of psychological attachments so that shadow worlds and histories become inaccessible, as if unneeded for building resilient futures. The questions raised are also about the nature of ownership (state, public, individual, community, or civic), situatedness (class, ethnic, gendered, generational), and the media of the means of perception.

Critique of this sort also provides a guide for citizens who are entangled and complicit with friends, kin, and acquaintances in a meritocratic system of gated expert communities that as matters of security, bureaucratic in-

stinct, or competitive advantage are resistant to full transparency but not unhappy when information is made available from friendly sources other than themselves. It helps citizens become fellow detectives. In that modality it contributes to making a more informed and aware citizenry, one that eschews tearing the society apart, yet persists in forcing questions about social policy. There is a cat-and-mouse game for information that networks of artists keep alive. At its most radical, the project, as Lim puts it, is "a way . . . to force the issue. . . . Using Singapore as a laboratory . . . destroying Singapore as a national narrative, I'm actually breaking up [the national narrative]. You know Singapore doesn't really exist at all" (June 8, 2016, tape 2). Singapore as a material locus and Singapore as found in alternative narratives such as "the Singapore story" is deconstructable, reconstructable, changeable, along with changing epistemic objects and objective correlatives.

GENERATING INFRASTRUCTURE CURIOSITY: *ALL LINES FLOW OUT* (*SEA STATE 0*)

all lines flow out, sometimes also titled *Internal Waters*, operates as *SEA STATE 0*, a view from the *longkangs*—the storm drainage system now becoming placid greening canals (each year with more green landscaping and recreational facilities)—looking up and out at the land, passing under bridges, and through culverts, with maintenance personnel checking for fallen branches and obstructions from a rainstorm, and a male figure walking through nearly dry canals, kneeling to inspect tiny organisms in the rivulets, kayaking or rafting into the two larger rivers that run through the city (Lim 2012b). It is shot in letterbox wide-screen format and sometimes installed with black framing to look literally like a letterbox, wider horizontally than vertically.[10] Internal waters are a kind of repressed subconscious, or a view of the infrastructure that one normally takes for granted but does not inspect as the video does. The first time I saw *all lines flow out*, at the Singapore Art Museum as part of the 2011 Singapore Biennale, I was mesmerized, returning to it over and over, truly a different view of places so familiar from the land above, also at times filled with trash and refuse, a jarring sight for a hyperclean city and a reminder again of the underbelly of any complex urban living space. One could fantasize about creatures (and even people) seeking the shadows here, or accepting the invitation to do a kind of urban nature walk along the banks.

It reminded me of Houston, another city of cement-lined storm drainage, kayaking down which can provide an alternative sensorium, accessing in some stretches the earlier lush bayou-wetlands ecology, into which pipes and cement were installed, in an often losing battle against flooding. It also reminded me of the Dutch engineering of canals in both Batavia and Bangkok. The Dutch engineering prowess remains influential in today's Delft-Singapore water research alliance; Singapore's annual Water Week Expo and Symposium on new water technologies, including research projects from the National University of Singapore and the Nanyang Technical University, such as using fish to monitor pollution and plants for phytoremediation; and trade shows for new desalination technologies, recycling, purifying, and producing clean NewWater to drink. Out of sight, but on the soundtrack, are occasional sounds of the ocean and of aircraft.

One backstory of *all lines flow out* for local viewers is the escape from the old high-security prison at Whitley Detention Centre of the suspected Jemaah Islamiyah terrorist Mas Selamat through these drains, which flushed him out to sea. Lim lightly alludes to this in a scene of a man being washed out to sea, but the film focuses on other themes—cleaning the drains and observing micro life-forms in the water—and ends disjunctively with a voice in an otherwise-voiceless film discussing the dilemmas of living exposed to the storms and seas on a house perched on a pier. Another, more distant source inspiration might be Gopal Baratham's 1974 short story "Island," in which a dissident group is compelled to flee through the "channels leading to the open sea" (2015, 56). They had been distributing a "street paper" that argued against the developmental nation-building ideology, claiming that "you are unhappy and dare not admit this to anyone, because of the manner in which your masters kennel you in neat boxes" (188).

There is a strong tendency to overread the political subtext in Lim's work: it is an obsessive local game, and it is there, but politics in Singapore, as in Java and Thailand, often does not work well when it is blunt, and Lim's insistence on a gestural strategy is an alternative politics of curiosity. It is also a style of small-society politics, where everyone knows everyone in overlapping small social circles. And it is a strategy in illiberal polities.

And yet the political story is, in a way, inescapable. The project started as a reaction to the event, to the dramatic escape of Mas Selamat, which suddenly brought to light this prison and the use of the (old, British-legacy) Internal Security Act, under which people are incarcerated without a trial.

These are things that are supposed to be secret, that people are not supposed to know about. Suddenly there was publicity, and "a lot of the police and army, and everybody was mobilized to look for this person in the forest, in the drains, in all the nooks and crannies of Singapore" (Lim 2011a). Lim says, "This event gave me the impetus to look into the drains, exploring the drains, actually, without any idea of making a film or making an artwork, and when I was there I found things." And so he began to think about the drainage systems, the canal systems, as a form: "For the city, it is a form of expelling the water, also, something that when there is too much of it, it comes out, so it is interesting that the person used these systems to escape." Although, like Venice, Singapore is an island or set of islands, "Singaporeans do not think of Singapore as an island, we have become disconnected from the sea. In the 1970s the government took away the properties of people who lived along the coast. . . .

> The thing I found quite interesting was that *when I walk around Singapore I see people staring into the canals*, looking at the drains actually, and I was thinking maybe that's a kind of reminder to them of the outside in a sense that there is a boundary. . . . Another thing that I found also was that in the canals when you are moving along in the canals is that you have this space that is completely foreign to the people who live, say in Singapore, . . . you have this juxtaposition of the sound of the city [raising hands up by his head] from above actually [opens hands wide] so you have this space that is totally foreign [hands showing two levels one above the other], very, it looks like almost dead and uninhabitable, no people at all, but then on top [hands high above head] over it, you have almost like a voice-over narrative of the city moving on top actually. So I find that quite interesting. (Lim 2011a)

From looking into the drains to shooting some footage to see what it might reveal to reshooting with a different lens to squeezing, cropping, and letterboxing, the project evolved with a kind of autopoiesis: "The work is kind of like speaking to me, and in a way, I kind of have to destroy the initial concept . . . and find what concepts are there inside, and then I move forward" (Lim 2011a).

In the final segment, we move through a cement-lined canal and across a sandy reclaimed-land shoreline, coming suddenly to the water surrounding the island and a trace of the houses that used to populate the fringes of the island and its rivers. The camera crosses a covered wooden pier-walkway

with white banisters and pillars, leading to a blue-tiled doorframe with two crosses, and a wrought-metal grill door. Inside, the camera looks out a window into the busy Straits of Johor, where in some clips one sees a fisher's hut and platform on stilts. A woman's voice from inside the pier house speaks of the fearful monsoons and raging storms, and her husband's assurances that the pilings were secure. Water sloshes; the camera descends into the waves. A swimmer in an orange life jacket bobs in the turbulence, looking at the city horizon in one direction and cargo ships in the other. Why, Lim wonders, does this house still stand when all the rest of the coast belongs to the government? He says he found this house, to his surprise, while filming *SEA STATE 1*. The husband has since died, and the house has finally also been taken by the government. The ending foregrounds many of the themes of *SEA STATE*—dispossession, repression, reclamation, drift.

But in fact Lim's art is full of such sly MacGuffins and treasure-hunt clues for those who are curious. The house is the Lim Chu Kang Pier House, one of several properties of the Cashin family, and the female voice is Lily Cashin, a former lawyer turned professional dancer and widow of the well-known lawyer and Rugby Union president (1977–87) Howard Cashin (d. 2009). Until 2009 the Pier House was their weekend retreat, and earlier it had been part of a larger estate. Lim never denies this and will readily tell you about it. He even includes the video interview or oral history he did with Lily Cashin in the archives or "sea book" of *SEA STATE 8*, from which the voice in the house is taken. The job of the artwork is to provoke curiosity, to seek out the fascinating stories not made explicit, and thereby to contemplate the larger implications of historical changes. The job of the artwork is searching through clues and connections and parallels, rather than reducing them to a particular house.

> There were many people living in the sea when the British came, and they copied the structure: there were many pier villas in Singapore, you know jetties with houses, but all that is gone except now the Cashin house. . . . The thing is when they did this they didn't record it, there is no active recording so a lot of the material is through looking at charts, actually. You look at the charts, and you need to see what's happening in the charts, decipher what's happening. (June 2018, author's interview)

In the National Library, he says, he found only two booklets about the beginnings of the reclamation projects, one containing 1970s photos without any narrative, the other a study of the fishing community with a few photo-

graphs: "Basically what happened was they reclaimed the land and then the fishermen couldn't get to the sea. They had to drag the boats from the house to the sea, so they had pictures of that. This is sensitive material, they don't want to tell people about it, I guess" (June 2018, author's interview).

When Lim added the final segment with Lily Cashin's voice and the swimmer bobbing in the sea in an orange life jacket, his producer found it incompatible with the rest of the film and urged him to leave it out. But Lim insisted. He says that "sometimes you are making art and you want it to look nice and conform to a thing, but then sometimes you want to make it, and give it a kick." As this was for a video installation in Singapore, "I felt people needed to know about this house, about this memory, so yeah, it is in there" (June 2018, author's interview).

Internal Waters (or *all lines flow out*) allegorizes subconscious knowledge, the surprise of re-cognizing things suppressed, forgotten, classified, or screened out lest they disturb civilian life. Such things include guarded technical work, animal laboratories necessary for medical research, transmission lines and infrastructures, sequestered and gated offices and apartments, male guest workers doing construction, and female guest workers doing child care, elder care, and domestic work. Interior fluids, enzymes, and metabolisms also mediate, redistribute, partition, and remix the bio-ecologies of disease and health, as became visible with SARS, avian flu, malaria, dengue, and COVID-19. Melioidosis (caused by the soil bacterium *Burkholderia pseudomallei*), gastric cancers, and haze pollution, among other things, cross membranes of bio-aero-geo-aquatic surroundings. When you step off a plane at Changi Airport, you pass by heat sensors looking for indications of infection, installed originally during the SARS crisis (Fischer 2013a), then activated again for the MERS scare, and now always ready on standby.

META-STABLE OUT-OF-BOUNDS MARKERS (*SEA STATE 1*)

A hundred and ten buoys line up on the wall in *Inside/Outside* (*SEA STATE 1*), each pictured from the front and the back, looking out to sea and back toward Singapore (plate 22). They have wonderful shapes, a play of angularities, many looking, with their caps and turbans (in my mind's eye), like early-modern (seventeenth-century) Acehnese marines lined up for battle with the Portuguese, around the Riau Islands. They remind of those Acehnese defenders who, in defeat, committed suicide on Pulau Sejahat, the Is-

land of Evil. Or they remind of the ghosts of Bugis seafarers and *orang laut* (lit., people of the sea); of port officials (*temmangung*, *bendahara*, *laksamana*) and privateers of the rajas of the gambier, pepper, and spice economies; of Chinese pirates who plied the archipelago's waters; and of seafarers lost in the shipwrecks that litter the seabed. In the middle of the room, an actual buoy, encrusted with barnacles, lies on its side (or is stood upright). Barnacles grow fast in the warm waters around Singapore, and ports are kept busy cleaning them off (plate 23).

Each buoy is designed for its particular location. They are *meta-stable* and *multistable* markers (shifting figure and ground) of offshore temporary autonomous zones: special economic zones, refugee camps, penal colonies, quarantine stations, military training zones, spaces of camouflage and commodities laundering, and industrial off-limits zones.[11] They project interior discontents and anxieties onto outside spaces: fortified islands, territorial water markers, beacons of safety, zones of exception.[12] These temporary and often-shifting zones are, in the physical world, analogues of the "out-of-bounds markers" set by censors for the publishing and arts world: there are red lines not to be crossed, but one is never sure exactly where or what they are. They are also analogues of contested and shifting sovereign demarcations and national security concerns in the maritime environment.

Pulau Senang in the 1860s, for instance, housed a utopian penal colony to demonstrate the value of reform through hard labor on a fresh-air, unfenced island, where guards carried no guns. After three years, the experiment in 1863 imploded in a riot, the killing of four officers, and the burning of the buildings. Jean Tay's play *Senang*, stunningly directed by Kok Heng Leun with an all-male cast in 2014 at the Studio Theater of the School of the Arts, dramatized the voices of the prisoners and their British superintendent in a mix of English, Hokkien, Cantonese, and Mandarin (Tay 2018). For the bonding and self-discipline of the male prisoners, Tay drew on the fourteenth-century *The Water Margin*, by Shi Nai An (Shapiro 1980), a tale of an outlaw brotherhood on Mt. Liang that has long served as a charter myth for initiation into Chinese secret societies and their codes of loyalty. The Hokkien- and Cantonese-speaking prisoners used these codes in powerful male chants and displays of bodily strength. As a parallel pedagogy for the Christian outlook of the superintendent, Tay drew on John Milton's *Paradise Lost* ([1667] 1674). The superintendent remembers being forced as a child to read the Bible and Milton (although he can remember only one line of *Paradise Lost*), leavened by the Protestant work ethic he learned in En-

gland from a gentle ex-con who taught him the building trade. That ethic provides him a model for the idea of the utopian penal colony where collective work builds character and redemption. A prisoner, meanwhile, recalls, "Pa made me read the Buddhist Keng, keeping time beating on a gourd."

There are still pirates today in the Singapore Strait and the Strait of Malacca, siphoning off oil from tankers. In 1824 the Dutch and English divided the labor of trying to secure the shipping lanes; today Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, and India divide the antipirate policing. There are also again boatloads of refugees from Afghanistan, Myanmar, and other zones of conflict in these waters, as there were after the Vietnam War, when the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' Galang Refugee Camp was established just south of Singapore on Pulau Galang (an island attached to Batam). It hosted 250,000 people from 1975 to 1996. When I visited in 2010, a church, a Buddhist temple, and other buildings still remained in good working condition, maintained mainly for the few tourists. Pulau Galang is linked by two bridges to Batam, a legacy of Indonesian president B. J. Habibie's plan to turn the Riau Islands and Singapore into an interlinked transnational economic zone.

But sand smugglers and "sand wars" are more central than pirates or refugees to *SEA STATE 1*. Seventy-seven percent of the sand dredgers in the world are said to be working the waters between Singapore and Malaysia (Milton 2010), and in *SEA STATE 7* we listen to Foo Say Juan, a former sand surveyor working for a Japanese company, describe the visible-invisible *meta-stable* work of sand mining and transport (plates 24 and 25).

Buoys, lighthouses, small islands, and rocks are beacons and warnings, double faced, double functioned, with a dual use. A key buoy in Lim's vocabulary is the Sajahat Buoy off the shore of Pulau Sajahat, which, along with a smaller island, Pulau Sejahat Kechil (little), disappeared from navigation charts between 2000 and 2012.[13] They were incorporated into the larger island Pulau Tekong. *Inside/Out*, Lim's website says, "reverses how we look at what constitutes a nation, borders, what is solid and what changes and how we determine that we are part of a given group or not. . . . [The buoys] are water border markers of Singapore," and the installation included two maps of Singapore and an internet radio connection of live ship-to-shore transmissions used for navigation in Singapore's harbors.[14]

AS EVIL DISAPPEARS AND SAFE SEAS APPEAR (*SEA STATE 2*)

The evil that disappears is not in the past but is what occurs in the present while we are distracted. Sand and land, even islands, disappear and reappear as land reclamation. The enabling extralegal maneuvers occur out of sight, in forged papers, under national security, subtly through contracting, permits, and other camouflage.

A video of the process of land reclamation, a "sandwich" of coastal landscape strips (now in *SEA STATE 7*), seen from the sea, rotated ninety degrees are, in Lim's words, "placed side-to-side so that the vertical strata of tropical blue sky, water and white sandy horizons appear abstract." In the video the side-by-side strips move up and down, each at its own pace (plate 1). The effect is gorgeous, the movement mesmerizing. It is one of my favorite pieces, in part because it captures so many elements of the working landscape of the shore: port activities, container wharfs, dredgers mining sand from the sea and shooting it in arcs into waiting barges, and more (plates 26 and 27). The land moves up and down, a transform of the video shot from a moving boat. Lim says that he cut the video in half: half was actually water, and half was land. He cut the water out. But, he says, the *land* that you see used to be *sea* (it is reclamation *land*, sand from the *sea*), and it remains under the Maritime and Port Authority, marked on navigation maps as still part of the sea until it gets consolidated and is transferred by proclamation to the Land Authority.

But Pulau Sejahat, the Evil Island, to which the title alludes, is not quite what it seems. Until recently, it was haunted by multiple cultural ghosts, in good Singaporean plural society fashion. Its name is the Malay word for "evil," "cursed," or "naughty," or just "bad," but not just because it was one of the islands and rocks that are always dangerous, cursed, for sailors. Conscripts in Singapore's military service, sent to Pulau Sejahat and Tekong for training exercises, attest to its ghosts. Pulau Sajahat is said to be where Acehnese marines committed suicide with their sacralized kris, when they were out-technologized by the Portuguese in the eighteenth century. Their magical kris-released spirits were thus bound to the island, and their commander was transmuted into a sacred rock, which used to draw pilgrims and sailors. A small temple was built alongside. Both rock and temple were known in Hokkien as *Tua Peh Kong* or in Hakka as *Thai Phak* or *Pek Koong*, referring to a Hakka man, Zhang Li, who, bound for Sumatra, was blown off

course, northward along the Malacca current, and into Penang. When the island was disappeared, the temple was moved to Bedok North Avenue 4 on Singapore's main island, where it still hosts a statue of Tua Peh Kong (Zhang Li), who, albeit Chinese, is dressed in traditional Malay garb. Such ecumenicism had a ritual past, when on the fifteenth of the tenth lunar month, Hakkas and Teochews from Pulau Tekong would "invite" the *Tua Peh Kong* of Pulau Sejahat to attend their Chinese opera. In World War II, Pulau Sejahat was part of the fifty-one gun batteries and pillboxes arrayed along the southern coast of Singapore as defense against an expected Japanese invasion. But it was the ill-starred fate of the Pulau Sejahat defenses that they were unused because the Japanese invaded from the north instead.

However, all this history and the name are MacGuffins. Through Lim's art *gesture*, Pulau Sejahat becomes instead an icon of land reclamations that are geopolitical matters not just for Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia but Vietnam, Cambodia, and Burma, and most recently in the South China Sea as China rapidly extends its naval footprint on the Spratly and Paracel island chains. Sand is moved in massive quantities, sometimes through bilateral agreements and trade agreements, often through subcontractors unacknowledged, and technically illegal.[15] As Foo, Lim's sandman (installed as a separate video close-up of his weather-beaten face and working-class voice), points out, while fine river sand (often from Cambodia or Vietnam) is needed for the concrete used in high rises and for beaches, coarse sea sand and aggregate are needed for creating solid ground (Open Development Cambodia, 2013).

"Sand wars" and reclamation projects are a feature of international competition. Singapore threatened in 2014 to go to the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea in Hamburg if Malaysia did not stop a private two-thousand-hectare land-reclamation project expanding in the Straits of Johor toward Singapore.[16] In 2003 Indonesia became concerned with the imminent disappearance of Nipah Island, one of the eighty-three border islands that are points of reference for demarcating the border with Singapore. The nearby Sultan Shoal in Singapore's waters was expanding by land reclamation with sand perhaps dredged from around Nipah. Indonesian president Megawati Sukarnoputri visited Nipah Island on a navy vessel to express concern and set in motion in 2004 a plan to raise the island above sea level and expand it through land reclamation. An intertidal island, it measured 60 hectares at low tide but only 0.62 hectares at high tide. Since then, the island has undergone a $30 million land reclamation, and is being prepared

to become a key transit anchorage area, naval base, oil storage facility, and free-trade zone. In 2009 a new border-demarcation treaty was signed using Nipah as Indonesia's base reference.

Land, like islands, can also disappear from maps. "Sand and aggregate are stored in vast stockpiles in the areas of Seletar and Tampines, and are sold to contractors when regional disputes threaten the availability of the material," writes landscape architect (and geographer) Joshua Comaroff (2014), noting, "The large tracts of land dedicated to storing sand and gravel aggregate become securitized sites—their area is taken 'off the map.'"

The erasure of islands by incorporation or renaming is for Lim part of a broader effort by the Sea State of Singapore to put out of mind what happens in the sea, nowhere more clearly articulated than in a 2011 Singapore navy recruitment ad, which Lim and Takuji Kogo of the Candy Factory transformed into wonderful 2:24-minute multimedia video spoof. The image is a doubled, mirrored view of a housing estate, slowly spinning into kaleidoscopic geometries, as if seen, top down, from the nose of a missile, and as if targeting an Indian sweeper running across an immaculately bricked and gardened public area between apartment blocks. An electronic robot sings the words of the ad (plate 2)

> "We all take the sea for granted." (*The image tilts to the right and takes on a mirrored geometrical abstraction, with diamonds of green grass, and the apartment block facades on their sides, looking as if one were looking down from the air.*) "But that would not be possible without the advanced naval technology that is deployed around our shores. Take the sophisticated Harpoon missiles." (*The image begins to spin like a missile, and begins to move downward as if targeting the city below.*) "Smart weapons, installed on the navy's missile Corvettes, can destroy targets as far as 90 kilometers away. To avoid detection, they travel at blistering speed just a few feet above the waves. They are deadly and they are dependable, but what's the best thing about these missiles? They make sure you don't even have to think about the sea. Ever."
>
> "Life wouldn't be the same without safe seas."

The Sejahat Buoy is gone. However, when you build a buoy, it has to be specific to the tidal conditions of the area, and thus Lim could ask the manufacturing company, which had an archive of buoys they had built, to make it again. He brought it to more or less its former location in the water and sank it there, leaving it for four weeks (plate 23).[17] He wanted to leave it

for a year but wryly notes that doing so "was very difficult as the sea is very controlled. You can't just do things. You have to go through the authorities and get permits and all that. So we did it illegally! And we only had the buoy in the water for four weeks." To his delight, it was already encrusted with a myriad of barnacles. The warm tropical waters around Singapore, as is well known in the shipping industry, allow barnacles to grow fast. Cleaning them off ship hulls is a constant source of income for the port's repair services industry. If you don't clean them off a buoy, they will sink the buoy to the bottom of the sea, though in the case of the original Sejahat Buoy it may just be encased in the sand poured over it. But perhaps, Lim speculates, the fast growth of barnacles is "also influenced by land reclamation. When you reclaim land you get less space for water and water pressure increases, tidal flow is faster, more nutrients run through, so there is more food, the barnacles grow faster, bigger" (Lim 2005; Lim 2015a; Lim 2022, section for *SEA STATE 2*). In any case, the project is about new ways of looking at the sea and the water: the location of this buoy maybe geolocationally the same, but its conditions have already been altered, and in *SEA STATE 9*, Lim has collected the invasive species of plants that come with seeds in the sand and make them part of an artwork that focuses attention both on them and on the fantasy spaces that their arrival might stimulate.[18]

Reflecting on the making of the artwork, Lim says, "Over the years collecting a lot of images of sand reclamation sites, and all that, I felt that it doesn't quite tell the story of the whole process. Because it is a *process*, *still images* didn't quite do it. I needed a poetic entry into the subject. So I have been looking out for traces" (author's interviews). Material traces, like the buoy itself, its growing of barnacles, and the invasive plant species carried by reclaimed sand, provide ways in which people can track the sea otherwise than they usually notice (a theme developed in *SEA STATE 9*).

In a supplementary short (3:45 minutes), Lim shifts from following mining of sand to mining of coal, following the business-plan shift of KTC, a Singapore-based mining company. After Indonesia banned the mining of sand for export, KTC shifted to coal. Capital is fungible, redeployable, fast. The dark particulate pollution from the ship's smokestack at the end of *all lines flow out* might allude to coal or oil, both important in Singapore's past and current political economies. Singapore was an important nineteenth-century coaling station for mercantile shipping and the British navy.

Lim's "sandwich" video and large Diasec-mounted photos—land, air, and sea in strips rotated ninety degrees so that the first impression is of color

abstractions—signal his Candy Factory–like play with geometry. The rotation (like the spin above) does things to perception, and one sees the container docks, city skyline, sand-dredging operations, and islands (Pulau Sejahat and others) mirrored, and occasionally superimposed, with novel adjacency, all in a sideways panorama as in a filmstrip. Lim notes that since the video was shot from a moving boat, the rotated panorama of video shots can give the viewer a different sense of the land as moving. To enhance the effect and to make it do more than just document, as noted above, Lim cut the video in half: "Half of it was actually water, half of it was land, so I cut the water out, and I put [in] the land; but actually the land that you see used to be sea" (author's interview). The process mimics that of the state. When the state does land reclamation, they continue to see the reclaimed land as sea, since it remains under control of the Maritime and Port Authority, and on nautical charts it is still marked as sea.

Mind spin and metaphor. At first, land reclamation was done manually by Indian workers employed by the British to create the port, and, after independence, to cut down the hills of Singapore and move the dirt by truck to the coast. The island has been growing in size since independence, and greening—aerial and satellite photography shows it to be much greener today than it was in 1965, initially for the aesthetics and health of a city in a garden, then as part of fighting climate change (cooling buildings and urban heat islands with vertical and rooftop gardens) and today in an effort to grow food (a reversal of an earlier policy of industrialization at the expense of farms). Not only does the land move and the sea provide land, but Singapore has long brought plants and fauna from all over the world. The great colonial-era Singapore Botanical Gardens, part of a global network and an acclimatization field site for crops such as rubber, today including an orchid-hybridizing research center, were once a working landscape, today a recreational and educational gem. The new Gardens by the Bay, like the older Night Safari zoo, and the new aquarium try to display ecological zones from around the world, spinning the mind, making what was distributed available in one venue for contemplation, pedagogy, and critique.[19]

SEA STATE 2 is thus a quadrascopic kaleidoscope of meta-stable out-of-bounds markers: of multicultural ghosts, of land reclamations and the geopolitics of sand, of erasures of landscape histories in the name of national security and safe seas, and of the always failing effort to demarcate carefully cultured land and alienated sea, turning mapped and well-known shallow seas into no-go zones.

The ship *Goryo 6 Ho*, visible in some of the *SEA STATE 2* video strips, is a trailing suction hopper dredger, owned by Hyundai Engineering and Construction of South Korea, flying the Belize flag. Two hundred twenty-four meters long and thirty-three meters wide, built in 1985, it was converted in 2001 from being a Panamax bulk carrier; it was called the *May Balota* until 1998 and the *St. Joseph* until 2002. *Panamax* refers to the maximum size limits for the Panama Canal. Not very efficient, with a single screw and a single rudder, it is not as maneuverable as purpose-built dredgers, and its substandard dredgers result in long loading times. Still, it carries 27,000 cubic meters of sand and works dredging projects near Singapore and in the Persian Gulf. On May 29, 2016, when I looked it up, it was at Batam, just south of Singapore.

Fascinating that one can just look up the positions of such ships on the internet. Sonic and electronic lines of flight on the internet, satellite, and radar provide a new informatics charting of boundary crossings on the high seas and in territorial waters. It is as if the sleeping, yet alert, bat-shaped Singapore island—as seen via Google satellites or from the fighter jets and naval radar systems on Singapore's six Formidable-class frigates and six Victory-class missile corvettes (of the Candy Factory naval ad remix)—is always sensing its surrounds. It makes the case of so-called sand smuggling even more interesting in the category of the known unknowns, or public secrets that are and are not accessible.

The poster for *SEA STATE 3: LINES IN THE CHART*, for instance, has a fragment of a navigational chart with almost no place-names except for a quarantine anchorage, called Red Calder, next to an Fl.R.4s buoy, and the name Batuan Merlin (Merlin Rock). When you Google Batuan Merlin, you immediately get the US Geospatial Intelligence Agency's Pub. 174, *Sailing Directions (Enroute): Strait of Malacca and Sumatra*, Twelfth Edition, 2013. What I find fascinating is not only that a tiny bit of information is sufficient to easily locate the fragment but also that the 2013 compendium notes that it provides "information *that cannot be shown graphically on nautical charts* and is not readily available elsewhere" (emphasis added).

What crosses lines in the chart unseen? Land, labor, capital, and bioecologies all move across the lines. Sand, money, smuggled wildlife, airborne infectious disease (SARS, MERS, avian flu, COVID-19), seaborne stowaways (invasive plants, rats), pollution (haze), and radioactivity are all only trackable and measurable, if at all, by instruments, prosthetic means of percep-

tion. The porous membranes of the city-state do their best to capture many of the moving bits, to put a face of sovereignty on things, as in the destruction of 7.9 tons of ivory, seized by Singapore over four years (2014–18). The seas are busy, not only on the surface with barges, tankers, and cargo ships, but also below with infrastructure: communication cables, gas pipelines, sonar mapping, internet tagging and tracking of fish and sea animals (using satellite systems), and cable repair ships (always in demand).[20]

Inversion spins the lines of the chart upside down. Taking bathymetric data, Lim inverts the deepest and the highest points. The land above sea level becomes depths; deep sea trenches become ridges; sea depths become mountains (plate 26). Lim uses 3D print technology to make sand prints of the inversion. With the inversion, the sea cables are brought up to view, as are shipwrecks scattered across the seabed. Lim stresses the work of creating visibility and legibility through a piecing together of "incomplete maps, anecdotal stories, and personal observation derived in turn from archival composites and the digital read-outs of hydrological surveys." The sea cables relate back to the early project *tsunami.net*, in which Lim and colleagues mapped the physicality of the invisible internet by walking from ISP (internet service provider) to ISP. That project, as told above, was inspired by the cutting of the main undersea cable for Singapore in 1999, which caused an internet blackout in Singapore and its connections to Taiwan for a day. While that wouldn't happen again since there are now multiple cables routed through Singapore, the politics of cable laying remains largely out of sight in a maze of financing. Malaysia, for instance, does not want to depend on cables through Singapore, but the financing of cables nonetheless cross-cuts national boundaries.[21]

The seabed, as the 3D sand print illustrates, is littered with shipwrecks, and, as the sandman sea captain Foo tells us, the islands and sand banks are still littered with cannons and unexploded World War II ordinance. Allan Sekula remarks in *Fish Story*, "Ships explode, leak, sink, collide. Accidents happen every day" (1995, 12). Breaks in cables happen at a rate of 150 or so a year.

NO ENTRY AND *DRIFT* (*SEA STATE 4* AND *SEA STATE 5*)

A barricade in the middle of the sea with a sign "No Entry" in English, Chinese, and Malay, signed "HDB" (the Housing Development Board), is another of the meta-stable out-of-bounds markers Lim encounters in his

rounds of the Singapore shores. It is in the northeast of Singapore's territorial waters, but is it a seawall, and why is the "No Entry" sign facing Singapore? Perhaps it is a territorial marker, but more likely it is a marker of Singapore's expansion plans, the large engineering project to evacuate the seawater and build out the island. In the meantime, it surprised Lim. When it was first presented in 2008 at the National University of Singapore Museum, Lim hosted a lottery. The winner got to sail with Lim to the edge of the seawall. "In activating and occupying the perimeter, the hope was that a discussion would be generated, about the gravitas that usually gather at points of territorial division."

Lim titles the *SEA STATE 4* piece *Line in the Chart* and complicates it in two short videos, *Drift (rope sketch)* and *Drift (stay still now to move)*, first exhibited in 2012 (Lim 2005–present; Lim 2015). A rope is laid out in the waters of the Straits of Johor between Singapore and Malaysia. We watch it lazily drift and take on shapes like nature's calligraphic brushstrokes. The metaphor is about the flux across arbitrary boundaries between the two nations, and perhaps a reference to the flexibility and tension that undersea cables need to maintain. A swimmer also drifts in the water with no special gear for some seven hours, making the point that the water is home, warm in the shallow waters off Singapore, the same as one's internal body temperature.

The short video clip *Cannot Take* (Lim 2018a) films Lim's encounter with a patrol boat. The camera is on the blue water; one hears, "Sir, cannot take!" We see a small motorboat with two figures some distance away. The dialogue is brief: "Huh?" "Cannot Take." "What? What happened?" "Classified, classified." "This, too, this is." "Yeah." "Oh, I didn't know." "Classified." "OK."

There is no confrontation, but the point, the gesture, is made. The clip appears, among other places, as a sidebar in a discussion Lim has with Kok Yam Tan, former deputy director of the Smart Nation Office (under the prime minister's office), titled, with lovely tongue in cheek, "OMG [oh my God] Classified!" (Lim and Tan 2019).

CAPSIZE AND *CAVERN* (*SEA STATE 6*)

Two plasma screens face one another, invoking circular geometries and inversions. In one, Lim capsizes his sailboat: we follow his circular movement into the water and back up onto the righted boat, with the water sometimes above where the sky should be, and the sky beneath (plate 27). In the facing screen, we go deep underground in a huge circular elevator shaft into

belly-of-the-whale-like oil storage galleries (plate 28). As the sound from one screen dies down, the sound from the other rises up, directing our gaze back and forth. *Capsize* has splashes and the muffled sound of being underwater, while *Cavern* has the clanging-metal machinery sound of cables lowering the elevator, as a bit of the Cascades song, "I'd like to know why, oh I'd like to know why" wells up but not loud enough to block out the sound of the elevator. Silence follows, then eerie sounds as the camera surveys a flooded area in the cave with a man lying in the water. He rises and splashes through the water, as the music becomes more symphonic and even sci-fi operatic (or oneiric, as if we are now in a dreamworld). A male voice comes over the loudspeaker with an instruction. The camera proceeds past a ramp and toward a wall. The music becomes an electronic whine. We see men in hard hats, hear the sound of a small blast, with falling water and shattered rock. A barge sails on the sea, perhaps carrying away the excavated rock to be used elsewhere. We are returned into the cavern and see the sailboat being carried by workers in yellow rubber boots and hard hats in a noir premonition of living under the sea (plate 29).[22]

The Jurong Rock Caverns we are privileged to view (normally off-limits) are 130 to 150 meters beneath the Banyan Basin on Jurong Island (the gated, highly secure petrochemical complex on seven islands fused together), far below other underground infrastructures: shopping malls (15 meters), the MRT subway (20–35 meters), and the deep-tunnel sewage system (20–60 meters). Phase 1 will provide commercial storage for 1.47 million cubic meters of tanks of liquid hydrocarbons (crude oil, condensate, naphtha, and gas) in five rock caverns (nine galleries). Phase 2 will double the capacity. Lui Pao Chuen, or P. C. Lui, as he is fondly and generally known, former chief defense scientist, who has overseen the project, says it's only a S$5 billion project. If one can spend S$5 billion for gambling (on the Marina Bay Sands casino and the Resorts World Sentosa casino), surely one can spend S$5 billion for the caverns. Feasibility studies are being done for other such underground adventures, including not just storage but perhaps putting libraries, laboratories, and four thousand scientists underground. Another set of studies explores floating platforms and building under the sea up from the seabed, and even building a dyke or wall out in the Singapore Strait (as shown in *Line in the Chart* and in *Cannot Take*; and as potential retaining walls to evacuate seawater), marking "a Singapore in Waiting," a Singapore to come.

The sailboat in the caverns was a solution to the artistic challenge that, by themselves, pictures of the inside of the caverns do not convey the under-

standing that this is about working and living under the sea. The caverns, Lim hopes, may also capture the idea of finitude: that all resources are limited, that even the sea and our use of it are finite. Lim says that in talking to the people who do land reclamation, they seem to regard sand resources as practically infinite, the way we once regarded fishing and whaling before they became endangered by overharvesting.

These great engineering projects are learning experiments, as well as mission-critical projects for Singapore's future. They are not without their problems, such as the flooding caused by the Marina Bay reservoir when the water levels were set too high. The Marina Bay reservoir, the centerpiece of a new civic downtown, has been turned into a backup reservoir for the island's freshwater supply, or so it is said. Lim is skeptical: there is insufficient movement for such a large body of water, and he thinks it is more about aesthetics than the actual water supply; the little filtration plant at the barrage to the sea, he thinks, is too small to do much.

His alter ego, the actor in blue shorts and a T-shirt, lying and walking in the water on the floor of the caverns, is the same as the actor in blue shorts in *all lines flow out*, and one reflects back to a scene in that video where six maintenance figures in rain gear inspect the canals, checking for obstructing debris after a heavy rain, and evidence of system faults. P. C. Lui sees huge underground reservoirs like the Jurong Caverns as a solution to the rising sea level, catching and storing fresh water as sea levels rise, even as some of the seawater can be, is, and will be desalinated.

Capsize and *Cavern* feature a modern fiberglass sailboat, but in the short video *Stealing the Trapeze* (and accompanying photographs), Lim pays tribute to the racing skills of Malay sailors of at least a century ago (Lim 2016d). He disputes the British claim to have invented the trapeze (a cable attached to the mast enabling a sailor to balance the boat by leaning backward over the windward side) or the tactic of "flying the trapeze" (leaning almost horizontally to the water). It was observed at least as early as 1902, three decades before the British claim to have invented it. In the early decades of the twentieth century, a number of texts commented that in races the sailors of Riau would always best the British. The sailboat, Lim notes, is a very interesting machine: it is actually an airplane going through two fluids, the hydrofoils underneath like two wings and the sail on top. In the video two sailors hang off the trapeze. A voice yells, "Yes! That's awesome! What? You just took one in the jugular, man!" The music soundtrack is Johnny Rock's "Across the Sky." One of the sailors hangs at a ninety-degree angle off

the side holding onto a rope: "Whoa! Yes!" (they laugh as they bump over a wave). Slowly we begin to see a cargo ship toward which the sailboat is heading. The second sailor joins the first. They lean out almost horizontally to the surface of the water, as Johnny Rock's remix of Paul and Linda McCartney's "Uncle Albert/Admiral Halsey" lets loose, "Aye across the water, aye across the sky."

Capsize and *Stealing the Trapeze* are about the thrill of "locating the wind," feeling the rush of air, the bounce of the wave, the smell of the salt air, almost flying. It's about feeling the wind on your neck and skull, using the data of all your senses, as well as nautical maps, radar, and remote sensing. It is, says Lim, "my own aesthetics," the "aesthetics of my art practice is this idea of, as a sailor, you are trying to form this relationship with something that is invisible, the wind." It is also about community, celebrating the sea as a lifeworld for Malay communities. Still today, Singaporeans with family in the Riau Islands will go to participate in sailing races there. Among the photographs of these events, there is one spectacular, colorful, and joyous one of seven young men sitting on a long, polished wooden sailing canoe ready to fly the trapeze.

SAND MAN (SEA STATE 7)

What kind of gesture is the hour-long interview with Foo Say Juan, with the camera steady on his face the entire time? Foo is one of those (sometimes difficult to interview) working-class people who can describe work processes in detail, while maintaining a studied ambiguity about what he calls "political sensitivities."[23] He worked as a sand surveyor in the 1990s and became a sailing coach and marina manager at the Republic of Singapore Yacht Club, the oldest yacht club in Southeast Asia, dating back to the nineteenth century, where over the years he and Lim became friends. Foo is a powerful stand-in for the many workers who make Singapore run. He also, methodologically, represents a way of accessing information that people in government departments might refuse to talk about. Instead of going to the government, go to the companies (as with remanufacturing the disappeared buoy), although companies that are still active in seeking government contracts may also not be free to talk about their work.

Foo gestures at what he calls "political things," or what the former editor of the *Straits Times*, Cheong Yip Seng, calls the OBs, the out-of-bounds taboo red lines (that can get you jailed or sued), lines not on the chart, or,

in fact, lines in danger of movement through repositioning (Cheong 2013). Lim's sea metaphor (*SEA STATE 5*) is apt: they are lines that drift and change with the current. Asked if he has been detained crossing the lines often, Foo hedges but recounts two incidents, once being detained by Malaysian naval forces, once by the Indonesian navy. (Both times they were robbed of equipment and money while the naval officials searched the vessel, holding the vessel's crew apart in the bow or forecastle.) The seas, and particularly the Singapore Strait, are an overlay of bureaucracy-administered spaces. "Sometimes," says Foo, "you may have a permit, but you infringe other authorities. . . . [S]ometimes they will say oh you need another permit, this is not enough. . . . [W]e have to comply . . . probably pay the fine, . . . and then just continue with the job."

Foo is another one of Lim's gestural points that expand outward, resonating with, and perhaps even explicitly in indirect conversation with, as Joleen Loh (2019) suggests, Allan Sekula's *Fish Story* and Sekula's engagement with maritime workers who—while mostly unseen and unrecognized by the outside world—are experts, able to explain what they do and how things work, and who thereby are sometimes in possession of knowledge about the hidden economy, even as they can see only parts of it. Sekula gives a wonderful example from Barcelona: "Weapons for the Iraqis in the forward hold. Weapons for the Iranians in the aft hold. Spanish dockers in Barcelona laugh at the irony of loading cargo with antagonistic destinations. For a moment the global supply network is comically localized, as pictorially condensed as a good political cartoon. At the very least governments find it necessary to dispute the testimony of maritime workers" (1995, 32). Sekula goes on to muse, "How do governments . . . move cargo? How do they do it without stories being told by those who do the work? Could the desire for the fully automated movement of goods also be a desire for silence?" (1995, 32).

Foo is careful to stress that his work was in the 1990s, twenty years ago, mostly before the 1997 Malaysian ban on exporting sand and long before the 2007 Indonesian ban. Indonesia was more concerned at the time that if boundary islands were eroded and disappeared under the sea, the sovereignty dividing line in the straits would shift to its disadvantage. Thus the story of Nipah Island told above. By the time the bans came into effect, the big land-reclamation projects at Jurong and Pulau Bukum (the oil and petrochemical islands), Tuas (the industrial park and new port), Pasir Pajang (the container wharf), and Changi (the airport) were basically completed. Land

reclamation, of course, continues, and Singapore plans to grow further to 30 percent larger than it was in the 1960s (it is currently 25 percent larger).

The Japanese company Foo worked for was often shadowed by the Korean vessel *Goryo 6 Ho*, mentioned above in the section on *SEA STATE 3*, part of the lively competitions on the sea. Foo says the contract his company had was only for surveying for good-quality sand (not silt or clay). They would do this by taking core samples at meter depths and a mile apart systematically with differential GPS (GPS itself is insufficiently accurate, often a few meters off, so differential GPS gives a more accurate reading), and these then could be entered on computerized spreadsheets and maps. They also would do a magnetic survey to find metal items that could damage the dredging suction equipment, especially bombs and ordnance left over from World War II. These they would carefully tow to dumping sites (all away from Singapore).

Lim notes, in passing, a bit of the ethnic labor distributions. It is Burmese geologists who sit on Singapore's land-reclamation sites, patiently measuring the compacting until a site becomes solid enough to be called land. In a short video, Lim shows a speedboat crossing in front of a huge sandpile in Malaysia. It is a sandpile that the Chinese move around to use in their land-reclamation projects. They compact the sand with pressure rather than waiting for it to settle.

Foo is thus a fivefold *gesture* expanding outward, or lines of flight for workers, boundary claims and permit regimes (rather than conflict and war), informal economies, technological changes (from trucks to barges but also GPS, geomagnetic, and sonar informatics surveying), and interviewing methodologies (see note 37).

A short 1:10-minute video (*Sand 2*) looks down from above on a huge barge carrying sand, men shoveling and raking the sand, as it moves down the screen. This is then montaged with a boat sailing by huge piles of sand, followed by the camera moving into a new housing development of white cement buildings, with only some laundry hanging on poles but no other color, except a koi (carp, *Cyprinus carpio*) in the water; then workers in yellow hard hats and rubber boots carrying a sailboat; and, finally, views of new cement high-rise buildings. The barge moves horizontally across the sea, as the Cascades song wells up, "There must be a reason why, I'd like to know why, Oh why," switching back and forth between Malay and English. Another recent video series, *Drag, Drop, Pour* (2019), has close-ups, aesthet-

ically cropped images of sand being poured into a barge, as a kind of slurry, making wonderful geometric fluid patterns, and of a filled barge with white sand slowly moving below the camera. Shown in January 2019 at a gallery in Gillman Barracks, three of these videos are now filed on the website under *SEA STATE 9*.

SEA BOOK (*SEA STATE 8*)

One of the officials of the Maritime and Port Authority who watched the relocation of people from the southern islands in preparation for major land-reclamation projects is interviewed, like Foo, with the camera close up and steady on his face as part of an ongoing historical project initiated as an extension of Lim's *In Search of Raffles' Light(house)* installation at the museum of the National University of Singapore. A clip of the lighthouse expedition, shot at night featuring the lights of the lighthouse and the nearby boats, appears on the website, sped up, with a percussive soundtrack. In fact, not being able to get permission to go to the island, Lim simply went in the stealth of night and took what images he could from his boat. It was another of those out-of-bounds lines, about which the state and its bureaucrats were unsure whether it should be off limits or celebrated as an important part of history. The lighthouse is Singapore's southernmost territorial marker, which is the premise for trying to go there.

SEA STATE 8 is partly inspired by the career of Eric Ronald Alfred, a marine zoologist who is Singapore's first non-European director of the Raffles Museum and was the founder and curator of the Maritime Museum, which was under the Port of Singapore Authority. His interview appears here, reflecting on the relocation of people. His museum, Lim slyly observes, was in a way "a harbinger of the end of the sea for Singaporeans." Alfred says most of the islands were inhabited, and he took (or had a technician take) many pictures of the people as a record, but they were all left with the Port of Singapore Authority, and he does not know if they were preserved or thrown away. He reminisces about the difficulty of resettling a family that had no identity cards, and the scare when a ship dropped anchor in the evening in a spot close to where the air force was going to have live-fire exercises that night. With a bit of ingenuity, both situations were resolved.

The interview is part of an ongoing project with the National Library Board to create a website repository for maps, charts, interviews, and other materials related to Singapore's relationship with the sea. It will include in-

terviews with Captain Wilson Chua, retired chief hydrographer of the Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore; P. C. Lui, named in 1986 the first chief defense scientist and a visionary proponent of Singapore's large engineering projects, such as the Jurong Caverns; and Lily Cashin, the former lawyer turned professional dancer who with her husband, Howard, lived at the pier house featured in *SEA STATE 0*.

A key element of *SEA STATE 8* is two inverted navigation charts, one displaying a cutout part of the map with detailed charting intact, the other showing white space where the first has been removed. This pair has appeared in a number of installations as a kind of mnemonic of the play of what is disappeared or made to appear in detail, what is sea and what is land, and how they are represented, legalized, and materialized.

PROCLAMATIONS (*SEA STATE 9*)

When the sand between the sea and land becomes land is not just a physical moment of transport or compacting but also a legal one. Both *Sea Book* (*SEA STATE 8*) and *Proclamations* (*SEA STATE 9*) have collected legal documents from the time of the East India Company, through the colonial period, and into the independence period, for both Singapore and Malaysia. In 2018 Lim mounted a *Proclamations* exhibit in Barcelona. He is fond of quipping that land in Singapore is not inherited, as in other places, but declared, made by proclamation, under the Foreshores Act, originally enacted in October 1872, revised in 1985 and 1987, and most recently invoked in 2018. It was thanks to a conversation with someone from a real estate group that he heard of a new fence on reclamation land. He went to look and then tracked down the new 2018 proclamation (by the president of Singapore) making the fenced land legal.

Mimicking this form, Lim decided to build his own fence (in January 2020) on the National Gallery Singapore's roof, a somewhat-unwieldy exhibit space with two shallow pools as part of the architectural design. His plan was to have the fence cut through the pools and down into the hall below. And to make the point that something is being affected by the fence (by its proclamation), he would dye the color in the pool, so it changes whatever is underneath, a bit like when dropping sand in the sea, the color changes (author's interview, June 2018). The rooftop pools, he worried, might not be strong enough to support the fence installation through them and would pose a challenge. It's a problem with many art spaces in Singapore that are heritage buildings: it costs a lot to do anything in them.

Not only would *SEA STATE 9* incorporate these issues, but by gesturing to the Law of the Land Room, he hoped to invite fellow artists to contemplate land-reclamation spaces as fantasy and liminal spaces. The Law of the Land Room is the former chief justice's chambers in the Old Supreme Court, exquisitely refurbished as part of the new National Gallery Singapore. In it, the constitutional documents of Singapore are displayed, including the 1958 Constitution and the 1965 Declaration of Independence issued by Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew. Lim wants to display the series of land proclamations there.

On the corridor walls outside, he invited other artists to do a group show extracting Singaporeans' strange views on reclaimed land that appear in various art forms and in Singaporeans' attitudes toward the sea. For instance, he pointed to Royston Tan's 2003 coming-of-age, dark comedy-drama film *15* about teenage gangsters in Singapore. The dream sequences are all shot on reclaimed land. The Shaw Brothers 1949 comedy film *The Hunter* explored the transformation of the physical form of Singapore. Its location searches included quarries for sand and rock both in Singapore and in today's Malaysia. It shot some of the scenes in a Singapore quarry. And it created fantasy sequences of a flying wooden horse to travel to caves and a magic carpet flying over reclaimed land to a mirage of a city.[24] Among the artists he invited was Robert Zhao, founder of the Institute for Critical Zoologists, whose 2018 residency project at the NTU CCA is called *The Museum of Disappearance*, using old photographs of Singapore to unravel dormant narratives of relations with nature embedded in them, as well as doing active fieldwork in a patch of secondary forest that contains evidence of a man living there off the grid.

Zhao's focus on human interactions with vegetation is echoed in Lim's third gesture in *SEA STATE 9*: collecting the invasive species that grow on reclaimed land, brought as seeds with the imported sand. Some fifty photographs of the vegetation and shoreline are already online in *SEA STATE 9*, but the idea was to plant these on the roof of the National Gallery around the pool and the fence, replacing the ornamental plantings that were previously there. At first, the National Gallery resisted this, saying that their ornamental plants were important to their rating as a green building. But later they came back and conceded that the land-reclamation plants could also raise their green rating and would take less water to maintain.

In 2005 journalist Susanne Messmer in Berlin asked Lim if as an artist in a place known for censorship and press limits he was working "to bring light and make things right"; that is, was his art political in the traditional sense of social activism? Lim laughed and said no: "I am no Enlightener. I don't want to teach anything. When I decide on a project, it is usually for quite naïve reasons, because I want to know about it for myself. So I clarify for myself." He articulates at this moment a potentially deeper mode of critique that I called, above, a *nomadic curiosity* through the use of video and photography, which works most effectively by projecting a poetic aesthetic (*aisthētikos*, or relating to perception by the senses, sentience productive of meaning). It is poetic in remaining enigmatic, open to interpretation and further questioning. It connects the body and the environment through the recognition that unlike in the waters of northern Europe, where if you capsize, you have fifteen minutes before you die of hypothermia, here the sea temperature is the same as the internal body temperature, so that when a storm comes up and the temperature drops, people jump into the sea to keep warm, as you can stay in the sea indefinitely. *Drift* (aside from the poetic figure of the rope) has a figure drifting in the sea for seven hours. In *Capsize* and *Flying the Trapeze*, the sea, salt, and wind make one hyperaware of the skin and its interface with the world.

On the other hand, in a 2015 interview in Venice, Lim said:

> My first project [was] called *Inside/Outside*: I came up with this very simple rule by which I wanted to go around the border of Singapore and then if I found anything that's floating along the border I would take an image, one from inside and one from outside. So I did that, partly because in Singapore there was a lot of *self-censorship* going on, and so a lot of artists were afraid of doing work that was politicised. And *Sea State* is in a sense highly political, because what Singapore is doing in the sea is very politicised. . . . The sea has been corporatized by shipping companies, the military and the navy and when you see the way in which they communicate and represent the sea through their advertisements, they tend to use this trope of the sublime. (Lim and Mustafa 2015; emphasis added)

The sublime is a trope that is distancing. It is a European trope, one that finds the sea cold and alien. Against this trope, Lim's art tries to get us to look at and represent the sea differently, not only the sea, but the spaces

between the land and the sea, especially the intertidal spaces of mangrove swamps and mudflats that are being erased by reclamation. Nipah Island was a dramatic example of an intertidal island that expanded and contracted with the diurnal tides. The opening scene in one version of *all lines flow out* occurs in this intertidal space, showing a man struggling to make his way in a mudflat up to the more solid land. It is also the space of the new invasive vegetation that comes with the imported sand, which Lim planted atop the National Gallery Singapore, complete with their botanical names and their characteristics. It is the liminal fantasy space he wants artists such as Robert Zhao to explore "to capture the strange way" that today's Singaporeans see the sea, their disconnect with the sea as it used to be intimately experienced.

The artwork notion of executing "a gesture that expands," with which I started (following Lim's own theorical terms for how his art operates), is both self-protection in a world of out-of-bounds lines and also a *dynamic* way of getting people to see social, not just physical, features differently. The camera allows both artist and viewers a freedom of movement, almost, he suggests, *like a painter* who moves about as he paints, and unlike in the movies, where one is forced to sit in a darkened space. The movement in *Sandwich*, in particular, allows image resolution to be experienced in a different way as the body moves closer or further away. "I remember that when I started the [*SEA STATE*] project, a lot of people were asking me if I was sure I wanted to do this, because I could get myself in trouble for pulling out all these things and issues. So I devised a strategy for my work where instead of trying to come out with a position, like a political position, what I did was execute a gesture. A very neutral gesture, through which these situations expand" (Lim and Mustafa 2015). The flow in and out of the intertidal areas and the new coastal shorelines as seen from the sea in *Sandwich* exposes demographic features:

> In *Sandwich* you gradually see the sand being moved in, with the barges, you see the sand being dropped into the sea, you see the new land being fortified, with rocks and other things. It's quite interesting. . . . [T]he people who live along the coast are foreign labor, and then you see the really wealthy people from Sentosa Cove, who are not Singaporeans. It's the only place in Singapore where if you are a foreigner you can buy land, all reclaimed land, a place for the rich and famous I guess—it has all the mega yachts and things like that. And then you have the super sandy beaches, which to me are a very Western way of relating to the sea . . . sun

tanning, building sand castles and all that. Because when people walk around in Singapore, they tend to avoid the sun actually. (Lim and Mustafa 2015)

Image resolution operates differently than in movie houses: "With *Sandwich* you can walk far away and see it as whole, and when you get closer, it offers new information to you, you see more as you are coming closer. Normally, with moving images when you get closer the image doesn't operate that way." In the theater you are forced to sit in the dark; your body disappears, as does your ability to move about. In this regard, *Sandwich* is more like painting, as indeed is the process of moving sand and dropping it into the sea, where it changes the colors of the sea. "Painters, when they paint, they don't sit down, they paint from any direction, so it's so interesting because it is being looked at by the maker at so many levels. As a viewer, you can have that same kind of experience. So with *Sandwich* I was trying to have that approach" (Lim and Mustafa 2015).

Art becomes critique through a series of translations from an impetus (seeing people staring into the canals) to investigations and then to filming and editing, shaping and looking for "the poetic entry into the subject . . . looking out for traces" (https://vimeo.com/134796888). It is also a translation from personal symbols to publicly intelligible ones, often by way of dialogue with other artists (filmmaker Li Lim, environmental artist Robert Zhao), collectives (*tsunami.net*), and curators (Shabbir Hussain Mustafa, Ahmad Mashadi, Gridthiya Gaweewong, Ute Mehta Bauer). As artistic vocabularies gain force over multiple exhibits in different venues, they have the potential power to alter the *partitioning of the sensible*, to shift the cultural foundations of political common sense not just about politics but about the way we live in our increasingly reworked ecologies, our forms of advanced remanufacturing with the earth itself.

5

Water Notes on Rattan Strings

From deep within the plural society of Singapore, "Atok's last concert" provides tonalities and attunements—a master musician's final burst of performative finesse, delight in years of practice and showmanship. *Atok* is a Malay honorific for an older male relative, in this case the wedding singer Kuning Sulaiman, who died in 2016.[1] His son, Zai Kuning, who organized the show, is a master artist of a different kind and generation. Both recall to memory, consciousness, and pleasure a palimpsest of cultural resources—music, boatbuilding, sea peoples who live on the water, the poetics of sea and land, environmental and cosmological attachments, and the processes of performance arts and storytelling. Both revive undersongs of meaning that lie largely submerged in contemporary Malaysia, Singapore, and Southeast Asia.

Zai's artistry, in particular, is a threefold practice and pedagogy: (a) artwork as *cultural critique*, consciousness-raising, and reattunement of a cultural ethos; (b) *pedagogy for parents*, as well as children, on *how to actively tell stories* that empower lives and provide the conditions of possibility for *creative and critical*, rather than repetitive (*taqlid*), thinking; and (c) *opening of the sensorium* to emotion. Like Venice, Singapore evokes the deep histories and legacies of thalassocracies, polities focused on controlling the sea lanes rather than territory on land.[2]

I. ATOK'S LAST CONCERT

An extraordinary *ghazal* and *asli* concert took place at 4:00 p.m. on May 19, 2013, upstairs at the arts center in the White House on Emily Hill (or Mount Emily).[3] The performing ensemble was called Ombak Hitam (Dark Wave, or Black Tide). I had seen a small notice under the week's events for a concert of Malay music. Not knowing quite what to expect, I hoped it would not be folkloric but possibly an entrée to local Malay music circles. As a newcomer, little did I know that it was a celebratory swan song concert for Kuning Sulaiman, an octogenarian popular wedding band singer, or that his son Zai Kuning, who accompanied him, was a celebrated experimental music and performance artist, who a few years later (in 2017) would represent Singapore at the Venice Biennale with the largest of his ethereally floating ships made of rattan, rope, and wax representing *orang asli*, Bugis, Melanesian, and Sumatran sea peoples.

It was pouring monsoon rain as we arrived and watched the ensemble set up on the wood-floored upstairs living room of the stately, if decaying, two-story colonial villa. Arched floor-to-ceiling windows topped in colored stained glass, at the bow of the room, refracted color and faded elegance in the afternoon light. A small Persian carpet, in front of the simply demarcated space for the musicians, provided a civilizational accent. Simple metal folding chairs were set up for the audience.

"The acoustics," Zai Kuning, would say to journalist Lisabel Ting and repeat to the audience, "are 'reasonable.' The bounce is not so bad as in new buildings, because the walls here are porous and the floor is thick timber. The materials are great for acoustic music as after a few beats there won't be any more ringing, just a solid clear sound" (Kuning 2013a). To the small, but warm and enthusiastic, audience, he would elaborate, "Traditional musics, like those played in churches and temples, deal with the acoustics of space and the resonance of sound. We search for pure sound, sound which is not amplified. It relies on the talent of the artist to control the sound manually. An audience of sixty or seventy makes the sound quality better. The human body absorbs sound and lessens the echo. To have a full house would be [even] better."

Zai's father, Kuning Sulaiman, now eighty-three, who had made a career with his wife playing at weddings, loved the microphone, but for this evening Zai eschewed it, wanting, he said, to capture the old acoustic sound.[4] Kuning

Sulaiman had convened a small classical Malay music ensemble in the 1940s with friends from his home village, Pasir Panjang, and became known for playing *Melayu ghazal* and other forms of Malay traditional music (*zapin*, *joget*, *lambak*, *dondang sayang*) (Mohammad Nur 1990, 1993). In the program notes, Zai wrote:

> I was born and grew up in what many people call "the *mak cik* (auntie) industry" or "wedding bisness as an industry." The package was complete with good chef and good traditional music. As time pass, it is always the chatty DJ and his karaoke machine and big sound system who got the job. My father and mother is out of the "bisness" since early 90s and so am I. I don't play for wedding, nor corporate event. I play my own ghazal and search for different audiences or should I say, *I have to create my own floor to perform*. I am a wedding singer son by birth.

Introducing the music, Zai said the *Melayu ghazal* coalesced as a form, composed by poets and musicians, to represent the new Malay courts of the fifteenth century in Malacca, Johor, and Riau, using basic *qawali* (Sufi devotionals often inducing a transcendent state) and adding *Melayu asli* ("oldie," folk) music. According to his father, Zai said, the *Melayu musical ghazal* is a local invention, not an import from Arabia, as so often asserted. Arab influence only came later, after the fifteenth century. Ghazal *poetry*, of course, is Arabic, Persian, and Urdu in origin: a five- to fifteen-couplet structure about love, yearning, and metaphysical paradoxes. Or as Abdullah bin Mohammad (1971) puts it, "In Malay, ghazal is *not a poetic genre, but a musical form* . . . developed by a class of notables who were able to enjoy a more leisure[ly], secure, cosmopolitan, and urban life style" (quoted in Saparudin and Samad 2010, 131). Hamidah Khamis (1976) also argues that Malay *ghazal*, the court music of Johor, originates locally, from the Riau-Lingga archipelago. Since then, the music genres *Melayu ghazal* and *asli* music (originally folk music and more recently "oldies" of commercial popular music) have added instruments—violin, accordion, maracas, *gambus* (lute), double bass—and musical influences from various places, from the Caribbean and Europe to China.

Zai suggested a further distinction: "Ghazzal music is intricate melody and patterns with a fluidity of movement and notes, whereas *asli* (indigenous Malay) music is percussion-based. The melody that emerges from the rhythmic percussion sounds almost mournful, as if pining for decades past, while the trills of the harmonium and violin whisper about days gone by. It is

a very *intimate sound, quite close to talking. We play quietly, trying to talk to everybody.*" Here he is reflecting on the double meaning of *asli*. The *asli* music that Zai is particularly interested in is that of the *orang asli* ("original people") and specifically the *orang laut* (the sea people). His father's music is *asli* in the other sense: the oldies of popular music. The quiet "intimate sound, quite close to talking," is also a metaphor for the cultural currents carried across the waters. From across the waters one hears sound, even loud laughter and raucous play, muffled, quietly "trying to talk to everybody."

The music of Ombak Hitam evokes the ocean currents connecting distant peoples. Ombak Hitam, "the dark wave," refers specifically to the Kuroshio Current ("black tide") of Japan that flows north in the Pacific, like the Gulf Stream in the Atlantic, and is the name that Zai Kuning and Japanese double bassist and composer Tetsu Saitoh use when they play together (and includes Kuning Sulaiman when he has joined them). Saitoh takes it as a metaphor for how art and culture in general travel across the globe. Zai says his local equivalent is the maritime world of the Riau Islands, the seaways of Nusantara (a Sanskrit term meaning "between the islands"), particularly the currents of the Singapore and Malacca Straits.[5] Zai and Saitoh have been playing together since 1993. They met when Zai was on a cultural exchange in Tokyo. Later, when Zai was the artist in residence at the Substation in Singapore, he invited Saitoh to play with him there. They have maintained their collaboration ever since. Kuning Sulaiman has joined them onstage three times, once bringing along "the legendary Asnah Kanah," in whose combo he had played in the 1980s.[6]

Zai Kuning, age fifty, turned out to be a tall (at least next to his father), thin man who folded up into a cross-legged position like a wire sculpture, with shaggy black hair, large glasses, and a deep voice, and was dressed in a simple white cotton kurta and white sweatpants. His father, Kuning Sulaiman, at eighty-three, seemed tiny next to him, a lively old man with a now relatively thin but still melodious voice. He got so wound up that he kept playing faster and livelier encores, ending euphorically shaking hands of everyone in the front rows. Zai was solicitous, obviously worried that his father would wear himself out (they were to do an 8:00 p.m. concert as well). Periodically Zai helped him lift off his heavy accordion, encouraging him to sit and asking him if he was tired, but the center of attention could not sit still. Tetsu Saitoh, fifty-eight, claimed that Zai had given him only four days to try to figure out how to notate the music Kuning Sulaiman had written out for them to play as a duo. Smiling about the cross-cultural challenge, he

said, "It was difficult because the music is not Western, but I could use some Western theory to help figure out how to do it" (personal communication after the concert, March 19, 2013). The result: two magical duets between Saitoh's double bass and Kuning Sulaiman's accordion. They turned out to be "Gurindam Kamaruzaman" and "Shair," two songs from Kuning Sulaiman's childhood, written out especially for Saitoh, which, invoking the traditional lineage transmission of art forms, Zai said, "means Tetsu Saitoh inherits his song directly," adding, "They were not suitable for me, as I am basically a percussionist and guitar player. [They] do not need guitar and drum. [Their] origin in fact is just a vocal or humming at night" (email, March 21, 2013).

Other musicians joined in. Sitting next to Zai Kuning was Qamar Baba, a young percussionist who played both tabla and a larger *daf* (frame drum), while Zai played a larger two-sided drum set on the floor. Mohammad Noor Isamil, dressed in gorgeous silk kurta and *shalvar*, played violin and sang, and a younger musician, Mohammad Firdaus Mohammad, played flute, harmonium, and tambourine. Both wore tall, black fez-derived *songkok* caps, as did Qamar Baba. Kuning Sulaiman wore a shorter *songkok*. Female vocalist Shahirah Jamaluddin, in a green head scarf, black skirt, and tan jacket, added her rich voice.[7] Ayub Saop, another diminutive elder sitting on the side, came onstage with his violin for a couple of songs, accompanied by his shaggy-haired son, Reef, on tambourine.

Kuning Sulaiman played on and on into the magical night. The music continued into the next day among the family. Comments were dropped about the great effort it had taken to get Kuning Sulaiman up for the event. Zai's wife, Yunn, eulogized this effort movingly in the program notes. It was like a firework's magnificent finale: bursts of color and sound, burning itself out:

> I remember when we visited 'Tok Kuning to tell him about Ombak Hitam in Nov. 2012, I saw a glaze over his eyes and he was usually deep inside himself. Once in a while when we called him, he would look surprised and smile, like an angel who was awakened from his sleep. In early Feb 2013, when we finally managed to secure some money for the work, we took him to purchase new accordion as his was broken. In the shop, I took a Polaroid picture of him. Later, he looked at it and asked "who is this man?" He laughed when we told him that the man in the photograph is him. After one week, he told us that his arms were too weak to manage the accordion, so we had to change to a smaller one. As the weekly rehearsals with the ensemble proceeded, Atok began to register more and

more of his surroundings. However, in late February, when he heard the name Tetsu Saitoh mentioned, he asked aloud, "who is Tetsu?" We were shocked! As Zai described to him, he nodded slowly but hesitantly. This digging of the memory bank grows more intense as the music keeps on playing. Atok started to remember more of his youth, his village, and only a few days before [the] show, a childhood lullaby that his mother sang to him as a child. He has thus made new compositions that he will play with Tetsu in the show. Physically, he is able to stand and play the accordion now, and I believe, dance with it too. Witnessing the smothering fire gradually blazing in Atok is a truly marvelous experience. There is a boy in every old man, and an old man in every boy. As much as this performance is a celebration of Atok, I believe it is also the first welcome for our boy, Ruda, to becoming a man who will gladly embrace all the happenings in his life.

Saitoh put it this way in the program notes:

> In our daily life we need to wait, we need to believe, we need to listen. These three lines [wait, believe, listen] are the same in the end. If we can do these, we can meet ourselves whom we do not know so far. We will be able to meet an old man singing the secret in ourselves. Atok is one of these sage people. He is whispering in the wind who you really are, why people sing and dance, why people live. Now we have to wait, believe and listen in order to meet him. Otherwise he disappears soon like a bird.

I begin with this prelude to set two tones: First, I want to strike a Malay chord from within the plural society of Singapore that is also Chinese (Hokkien, Hakka, Hainanese, Cantonese), Indian (Tamil Chettiar, Tamil Chetty, Tamil Muslim, Ceylonese, North Indian, Parsi), Arab (Yemeni-Hadrami), Baghdadi Jewish (now also Ashkenazi Jewish), Armenian, and Eurasian, as well as including other linguistic, ethnic, and religious communities and the many hybrid or mixed permutations of the above, including several "Peranakan" mixtures (Chinese-Malay, Chinese-Javanese, Tamil-Malay) and Kristang-speaking Eurasians (Portuguese mixture). Malay is one of the three or four officially recognized segments of Singapore's plural society (Chinese, Malay, Tamil, other) but contains within it, as Zai is keen to demonstrate, its own internal diversity. Second, the symbolic resonances of an *atok* (old man, uncle) getting himself together for a final rally, celebrating his life cycle and the passage of generations, seem apt for a book about the effort to change the

ethos of a society, or to adapt cultural traditions to a rapidly changing society.[8] The theme of a boy in every old man and an old man in a boy, as Yunn so brilliantly narrates, has also an important further theme of masculinity that Zai's art tracks from his own boyhood on the beach, being a little wild and jumping into boats to explore and conquer the world. So, too, does his enjoyment in narrating both his own Bugis "warlord" ("not so nice people") descent through his father (from the East), and the origin stories of Malay power from "the first man" and first Malay prince, Dapunta Hyang (from the West), whose boat Zai re-creates for the Venice Biennale, a boat used for seven voyages around his sea-based empire of Srivijaya.

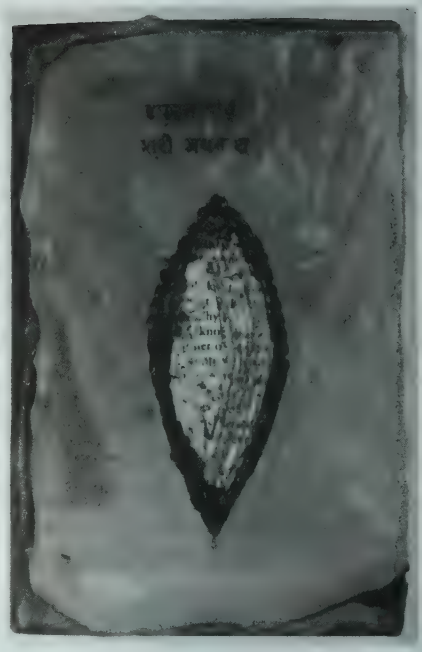
II. WATER NOTES ON RATTAN AND STRINGS

> I am not searching for my roots—I am a descendant of the Bugis, my mother is Chinese. I was raised by a bibik and a baba (so am Peranakan). For my roots, I should have gone to Makassar, Sulawesi, where my great grandfather was from, and to Fujian where my maternal ancestors are from.
> ZAI KUNING, *DAPUNTA HYANG CATALOGUE*

At the 2017 Venice Biennale, Zai Kuning's largest storytelling instrument to date was hung from the ceiling of the old Arsenal, as if hoisted and reclaimed from the depths (figure 5.1). Made of rattan ribs and netting, it is a seventeen-meter-long ghost ship, with a yellowed matte beeswax finish, secured with knotted red strings and dripping with books. (A wonderful, short, time-lapse video, produced by Ong Keng Sen of TheatreWorks, shows it being assembled [Kuning 2018].) The ship elicits re-call and response. It recalls into living memory and historical recovery the marginalized and dispossessed first peoples (*orang asli*) and forgotten pre-Islamic Buddhist and Hindu (especially Shaivite) and animist carriers of cosmological visions and vision quests alternate to, and redemptive for, the contemporary. Portraits of performers of the *mak yong* and *menora* dance-dramas of the *orang asli* and *orang laut* (sea people) watched from the Arsenal walls. One even "spoke" via an audiotape. Books (stones embalmed in beeswax) were piled around the boat, like offloaded or ready-to-load cargo, as if for a *siddha-yatra*, a voyage for blessings and spiritual power. Their waxed covers were engraved with the Buddhist graphic—a lozenge, rhombus, boat, cupped hand, or vulva—signifying life's rebirths, inscribed in different languages (figures 5.2 and 5.3). The voyages recalled were royal peregrinations

from Srivijaya (the seventh- to thirteenth-century largely Buddhist kingdom) to assert sovereignty, reaffirm political adherence, and accumulate trade goods. The Buddhist rhombus appears on the royal tombs at Bukit Seguntang, the thirty-meter-high hill overlooking Palembang, the capital of Srivijaya, on the island of Sumatra (Sanskrit *samudra*, "ocean island," or Swarnadwīpa, "island of gold"). From here the legendary founder of Srivijaya, Dapunta Hyang, made seven voyages across his realms. From here, at the fall of Srivijaya, the prince Parameswara sailed across the straits to reestablish his rule for a decade at Temasek (Singapore). There he converted to Islam and took the name Iskandar Shah (Alexander). Under attack, he again withdrew, moving north to establish the sultanate of Malacca, where

5.1 Zai Kuning, *Dapunta Hyang* ship, 2017. Rattan, red string, beeswax, stones, 17 meters. Fifty-Seventh Venice Biennale, Italy, 2017. Courtesy of Ota Fine Arts, Singapore, Tokyo, Shanghai.



5.2 (*left*) Zai Kuning, *Dapunta Hyang*: beeswax-embalmed book with lozenge engraving, Venice Biennale catalog cover, 2017. Courtesy of Ota Fine Arts, Singapore, Tokyo, Shanghai.

5.3 (*right*) Zai Kuning, *Dapunta Hyang*: beeswax-embalmed book with lozenge engraving, Venice Biennale catalog, 2017. Courtesy of Ota Fine Arts, Singapore, Tokyo, Shanghai.

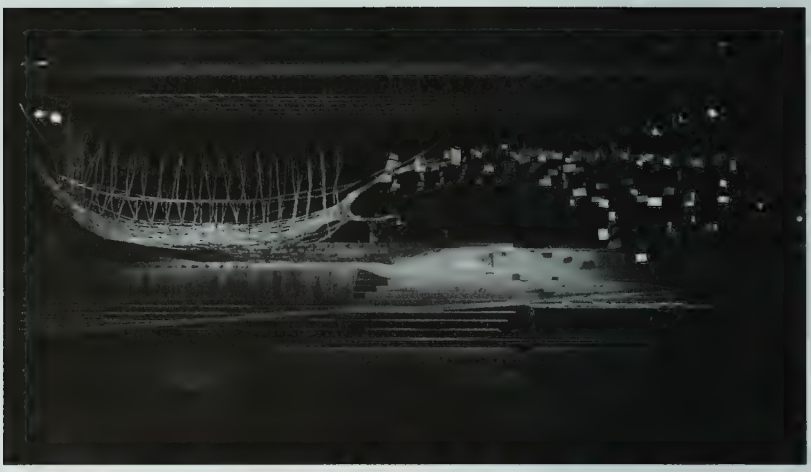
he died in 1404, but he is buried in Temasek (Singapore) on Bukit Larangan (Fort Canning).

At the 2017 Venice Biennale, Zai Kuning made the parallel between Venice and Singapore explicit: "In Singapore we are a great port and a lot of people came, same like Venice, great people come, merchants from everywhere, not just great merchants, but great musicians, great poets, great dramatists" (Kuning 2017d, 2017e). And like Venice, Singapore is built on a set of islands. Venice is constructed on a foundation of alder tree trunks used as pilings; Singapore on landfill made from removed hills and sand, extending the big island and fusing smaller ones together.[9]

I had seen an earlier edition of the Venice installation at the "Durian" or Esplanade, Singapore's performance center on Marina Bay (figures 5.4 and 5.5). I also watched the preparation of the boat for the Venice Biennale at Gillman Barracks' Studio 9, a workshop space. There everything was carefully laid out and marked for reassembly in Venice by Italian workers under the supervision of Zai's assistants, with careful logistic timelines charted out on a wall (figures 5.6 and 5.7). I had been reintroduced to Zai by Charles Lim, the artist who represented Singapore at the 2015 Venice Biennale, and the three of us spent an afternoon together in Changi Village, where Zai had rented a row house in what had once been British army officers' accommodations, along bucolic expanses of green grass and trees. Inside was a rattan decorative piece from a ship's bow (like that of the Dapunta Hyang ship from the 2015 Palais de Tokyo show in Paris), placed above an ink painting by Zai of the circle of life or "om" figure (figure 5.8).

In the workshop Zai had laid out an abstract map for Dapunta Hayang's voyages across the Malay realm of islands and different ethnic and linguistic groups. At this point the map was on pale-blue, watercolor-infused paper, with the land imaged as empty white spaces; but for the finished form see the video done in Venice (Kuning 2017d). It was a view of empire from the sea rather than the land, a nod to the contemporary trend in historiography to counter and supplement hegemonic histories written about, and from the point of view of, land empires. Inescapably, today it is also a reflection of a renewed maritime consciousness and need to know about maritime localities, as China expands and contests control of not only the waters of the South China Sea but ports from Australia (Darwin) and Sri Lanka (Hambantota) to Pakistan (Gawadar), Djibouti, and Greece (Piraeus). In Venice the map became more colorful, with dramatic swirls, as well as red strings or lines connecting the ports and places.

The Venice installation emphasized the books carried in the ships of Dapunta Hyang and so was called *Dapunta Hyang: Transmission of Knowledge*. Dapunta Hyang (671–702 CE) was, for Zai, the first *Malay* king, raja, or maharaja. From his seat on Sumatra (r. 671–702 CE), he made a series of seven voyages through the islands and ports of the Malay world—royal peregrinations marking sovereignty and accumulating power but also spiritual journeys, or *siddha-yatras*, in search of blessings and tantric enlightenment. *Hyang* is a Malay title meaning "deified ancestor" (or in Austronesian languages *hyan*, "ancestors").[10] He also had a Sanskrit name, Sri Jayanasa, and so perhaps was a Buddhist *dharmaraja*. Srivijaya was an important

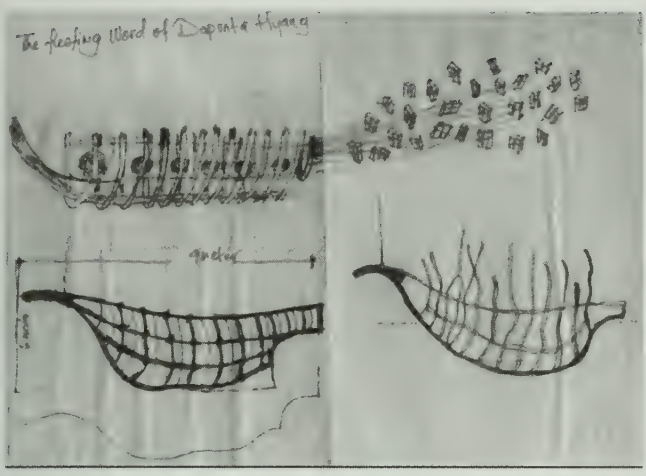


5.4 Zai Kuning, *Dapunta Hyang* ship, Singapore Esplanade, 2016. Rattan, red string, beeswax, stones. Courtesy of Ota Fine Arts, Singapore, Tokyo, Shanghai.

center of tantric or Vajrayana (diamond or thunderbolt vehicle) Buddhism. But the "tantrism" might have Austronesian-Melanesian roots as well (Acri 2017). In 689 CE the Chinese Buddhist monk Yijing, who stayed in Srivijaya for six months, reported that there were a thousand monks in residence. He also noted that there were eleven principal *chou* (port cities) along the Strait of Malacca (Imran ibn Tajudeen 2017, 505; Kuo 2014).

Palembang (and Melayu, a little further north) looked out toward the Malacca and Singapore Straits and beyond toward China. Across the straits, Malacca and Temasek (Malay *tasik*, "sea," so Temasek means "sea town") or Singapura ("royal town," or "lion town," where the lion is a symbol of royal power) were likewise built with forts and palaces on hills overlooking an estuary where inland rivers converge and ocean transshipment was effected (Malacca's Bukit Bendera is now known as St. Paul's Hill; Singapore's Bukit Larangan is now known as Fort Canning).

These were thalassocracies, controlling the coastline, with the interiors left to lesser *datuks* (local chiefs). The Sumatra Riau, historically, comprises the watersheds of four East Sumatra river systems—Rokan, Kampar, Siak, and Inderagiri—and the offshore islands. The Riau-Lingga archipelago extends from the south coast of Sumatra to the coasts and islands off



5.5 Zai Kuning, boat sketches, Singapore Esplanade, 2016. Pencil and paper. Courtesy of Ota Fine Arts, Singapore, Tokyo, Shanghai.

Malaysia and Singapore, a hinterland and transnational economic zone for Singapore and Indonesia.

The boat suspended in Venice's Arsenal represented the seventh of Dapunta Hyang's journeys, with a fleet, the stories say, carrying twenty thousand men. The seven voyages were not unlike the seven great diplomatic, military, and trading expeditions seven centuries later of the Chinese eunuch Admiral Zheng He, on boats built in Fujian and Nanjing (1405–33). Zheng He visited Palembang and Malacca, going further to India, Sri Lanka, and East Africa and famously bringing back to China a giraffe from Africa.[11] At the request of local Chinese merchants along the way, Zheng He quelled some local "pirates," though in at least one case off Palembang, they were able to fend him off. *Pirates* is a term from a legal perspective. In their own right, they were a political economy controlling sea lanes and directing trade to local ports.

This political economy was a maritime "galactic polity" network of small sea states that waxed and waned in the margins of, and in alliance with, larger thalassocracies such as Srivijaya (650–1377) on Sumatra, Tanjung Pura on Borneo (an outpost of Srivijaya from which the Malagasy seem to have migrated to Madagascar in the seventh century), and Majapahit (1293–1527)

5.6 Zai Kuning, preparation for Venice Biennale at Gillman Barracks, 2017. Photo: M. Fischer.

5.7 Zai Kuning, preparation for Venice Biennale at Gillman Barracks, 2017. Photo: M. Fischer.

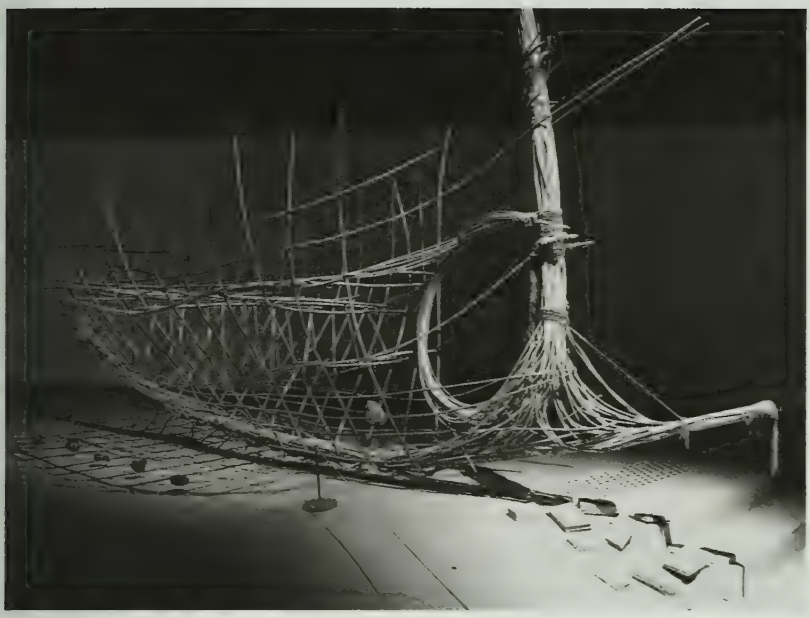
on Java (Adelaar 2017, 462). In the eleventh century, the Chola Empire made incursions. Long established on the Kaveri River in today's Tamil Nadu, from the third century BCE to the thirteenth century CE, the Cholas had been trading partners with the Southeast Asian ports. In 1025–45 they invaded, using the monsoons to move swiftly from port to port from Palembang to Melayu (Jambi), Temasek, Pannai, and Kedah on both sides of the Strait of Malacca. Their influence spread north into Thailand and around by sea to Cham (in Vietnam), and from Cham back west over land through the Khmer Empire (Cambodia). The Southeast Asian ports had long traded and engaged in tributary relations with China. China itself had a history of contending with the sea peoples along its own coast in Fujian (whence many migrants would eventually come to Singapore). The Southeast Asian ports traded westward with India, Yemen, and the Middle East.

The name Singapore seems to derive alternatively among the terms for the straits, the port(s), the island, and the location at the crossing between east–west navigation and north–south navigation (into the Malay Peninsula up the local rivers, and south between the island of Bintan and Batam). One attractive etymology from old navigation charts and maps suggests that the name Singapore derives from *Bar-xin-gapara*, "gateway to China." Other derivations suggest that the Singapore straits were a transition between seas and a place of danger from sudden squalls when awaiting the monsoon winds. The favored folk etymology today is from *singh* (lion) + *pura* (city), just as Venice once was also called the Lion City.[12]

This is not the moment to delve further into the fascinating regional histories of this southwestern side of "the Asian Mediterranean" (Gipouloux 2011). The point here, rather, is the vision of the interacting layers of history that Zai evokes with his five editions of the Dapunta Hyang boat. The first was called *Dapunta Mapping the Melayu* (shown at Ota Fine Arts in Tokyo and Singapore, 2013), emphasizing the sovereignty-marking royal peregrinations. As Zai put it in Venice, Dapunta Hyang mapped the hundreds of islands, ethnic groups, and languages of the Malay world and established connections among them.

In a previous installation and performance, titled *We Are Home and Everywhere* (i.e., we are at home everywhere), Zai appeared as a warrior-king infused with spiritual potency, naked to the waist, a body of pure energy (*tapasya*) (plate 31). Lifted into the air with a knife between his teeth and another in his hand, he hovers over a scarred wood platform, in which two knives and a chopper are impaled. The wood platform merges into a polished

5.8 Rattan decorative ship's bow and ink painting of circle of life or "om" figure, Zai Kuning's home, Changi Village, Singapore. Photo: M. Fischer.



5.9 Zai Kuning, *Dapunta Hyang* ship, Palais de Tokyo, 2015. Rattan, red string, beeswax, stones. Courtesy of Ota Fine Arts, Singapore, Tokyo, Shanghai.

steel surface on which there are two double rows of books embalmed in beeswax. Slowly the warrior-king is lowered onto the mirroring steel surface. He ponders his reflected image. It is a striking image, perhaps, of Siddhartha seeing conflict, violence, and the ravages of old age, causing him to turn toward introspection, meditation, and nonviolence. Dapunta Hyang, after all, also had the titles Tri Murti and Sri Tri Buana. Tri Murti refers to the three forms of divinity (creation, maintenance, destruction; often personified as Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva). Sri Tri Buana is lord of the three worlds (demons, humans, and gods or ancestors). But there are Austronesian-Melanesian roots as well. The archaeologist John Miksic (2017) notes that the Minangkabau of Sumatra, who controlled the river systems leading to the Melayu port, had three kings: Raja Adat (king of custom, law), Raja Ibadat (king of religion), and Raja Alam (king of mundane affairs); compare the double chiefs in Fiji (one for war, one for ritual).

So perhaps, more likely, it is instead an image of knife-throwing Bugis warlords, who came to the Riau from the east, from Sulawesi. They turned toward the pen and the printing press only in the nineteenth century, initi-

ating a shift, Zai says, from oral transmission to print.[13] Their bluntness and readiness to fight were part of their charisma. There are resonances of the politics of *arche*, or command through kinship and tribute, used by thalassocracies of Fiji and ancient Greece, analyzed by Marshall Sahlins (2004), to assert hegemony without sovereignty. Zai, at least, invokes this image in an interview with Bala Starr (Kuning [2013a]), showing off his skill at knife throwing and saying that Bugis are not necessarily nice.[14] It goes with his claimed sense of guilt at how the Bugis displaced the indigenous *orang laut*. More generally, though, he blames materialism and modernization for the destruction of feeling at home in the world and at times has withdrawn from urban life to a coastal village in Malaysia where he can reexperience the continuity of sea and land of his boyhood village along the south coast of Singapore. At the far end of the installation, a small boat (sampan) is suspended, with pebbles hanging down pointing at books: the realm of knowledge transmission, boat and book, metaphors for one another, the shape of one mimicking the engraving on the other (plate 30).

Another edition of the installation, commissioned by Singapore's Institute for Contemporary Art in 2014, was called *The Fleeting World of Dapunta Hyang*. This edition emphasized the fragmentary histories that are only now slowly being rediscovered through archaeology, epigraphy, searches of textual sources, and ethnography. Zai's visits over the years to the Riau Islands to try to experience life with the *orang laut*, and help them retain their cultural practices, are part of this effort to reclaim sea peoples' knowledge and vision of the world. A third edition, shown in 2015 at the Esplanade in Singapore, was called *Dapunta Hyang: Transmission of Knowledge*, and this name was retained for the fourth edition, presented at Art Basel Hong Kong (as part of the theme *Encounters*) and at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris (as part of a group show *Secret Archipelago*), as well as for the fifth edition in Venice (plate 33).[15]

Recovering history is not easy, and Zai wants to counter the forgetfulness of Malays who conflate being Malay with being Muslim, and particularly to counter the fundamentalism and intolerance that can grow on such erasures and singularizations. In the interview with Bala Starr, he bluntly says that of the two princes from Sumatra who are often invoked as founders of Singapore, the seventh-century Dapunta Hyang and the fourteenth-century Parameswara, the latter means nothing to him, because that is when the erasure of everything non-Islamic began.[16] His assertion of being Bugis rather than Malay is part of this recovery of the diversity of the pre-Islamic legacies

in the region. More softly, he writes in a catalog essay that Muslim memories have distorted or shortchanged history and thus consciousness, and that such distortion is not easily overcome:[17]

> Malays in the region began their history as memories from the last Malay King who was Parameswara, from the 14–15th century. That was a time when the Malays were converting to become Muslims. But not all Malays did so. Some of the sea people and islanders I met in Riau Archipelago are animists. Their rituals follow Hindu or Buddhist traditions, not Islam. I feel much more complete in some way [as] I dig deeper into the old Malay world which is not Muslim. Not all Malay people are Muslim, and they are still around us, like the Orang Laut. We have to respect this because they carry with them a history before Islam arrived in this region. (Kuning 2017b)

And further: "What I present is not about Singapore history, but rather it is the history and living cultures across Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand up to Vietnam. This is the Malay world that the world knows very little about. Even the Malays in Singapore do not know it well."

Zai's intuition is supported by increasing evidence that what we think of as Indian cultural transmission eastward from India may have been a more bidirectional flow. Malayo-Polynesians were the more venturesome seafarers, perhaps "going to India, and coming back with Sanskrit," rather than "Indian Sanskritizers radiating through Southeast Asia," although "the truth of the matter can be expected to lie somewhere between those bald extremes" (Imran ibn Tajudeen 2017, 504). There is at least the quite astonishing evidence of knowledge, translation, and reworking of concepts of "Indian" architecture and *vajra* tantrism *before* these were canonized in India. *Silpa sastras* (their textualization) date from the ninth century in India, but the earliest Javanese *candi* (temples) already using these forms are *a century earlier* and are simultaneous with the earliest freestanding temples in South Asia. Wall carvings accurately depicting classical Indian dance poses (*karana*) on the Prambanan temple are two hundred years earlier than the first known *karana* series carved on the Brihadisvara temple in Tanjore. The latter might well have been copied from the former at the instruction of a Chola king who had learned about them (Imran ibn Tajudeen 2017, 477). Moreover, the form of Borobudur (a Buddhist site) and Hindu temples in Java and Sumatra, and on the Thai coast, are fusions of Indian cosmograms and Austronesian-Melanesian *punden* (rectangular tiered an-

cestor mounds to the *hyan*, or ancestors). Dapunta Hyang, just like the Austronesian ancestor-gods, descended from the sky onto a mountain. The inscriptions at Srivijaya contain old Malay words, no longer used in modern Malay, but extant still in Batak in Sumatra.

In any case, in Venice, Zai eloquently provided a moral compass orienting his work (emphasis added):

> The Venice Biennale is an opportunity to open the door for the world to imagine *this very Malay empire*. The power it exercised over the region *is not incomparable to the Greek or Mongolian conquests*, but the history of the empire is buried and forgotten. *Bugis, Bawean, Batak, Acehnese, Balinese, Padang, Toba, Filipino, Austronesian people from Taiwan and many more came here* . . . found their way to co-exist with different belief systems. . . . Singapore is the result of a mixed group of people and eventually, these different ethnic groups came to identify themselves as "Malay." We don't have a written language. *We wrote in Sanskrit for a few hundred years and then changed to the Arabic writing system and finally, now we write and read in* [the Latin] *alphabet*. The Malays went through animism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and even Christianity. *The Orang Laut are one of the first people in this region*. They are still around *but they suffer from being discriminated as nomads and animists*. *The nature which they live in is all gone* with commercialism and "development." . . . They are *pariahs in their own* [maritime environment] land. This is not very different from the story of local peoples all over the world, but it is not made known enough especially for the people in Singapore and Southeast Asia. We have to understand and make such knowledge available *for our children as they are our future consciousness*. Singapore can be a center where we create such awareness about Southeast Asian people from food, diet, materials and nature. *It is not enough to be Singaporean knowing only materialism*. (Kuning 2017b)

To "install" the boat in Venice, Zai performed a ritual adapted from the *urak lavoi* (*orang lavoi*), or sea people of the coastal islands and western littoral of Thailand (the area around Krabi). With Thai artist Len Jittima, Zai had witnessed their biannual, premonsoon, three-day, two-night boat festival, ending with the release of a boat to drift (and carry away evil) toward the mythical, sacred mountain Gunung Jerai (in Kedah, Malaysia). The cosmic geography parallels that of the *orang laut* around Bintan. There the sacred center, the axis mundi, is the mountain Gunung Daik in the Linga

islands of the Riau archipelago. It also parallels the cosmic geographies of the Australonesians-Melanesians who moved through what today is the Malay world from the Toraja in Sulawesi in the east to the Minangkabau and Batak in Sumatra in the west. The sacred mountain and mandala structure, of course, also come from Hinduism and Buddhism (focused on Mt. Meru in the Himalayas of western Tibet), but Zai is keen not to forget the Austronesians-Melanesians and sea peoples' migrations from the east and to not accord significance only to the Indic and land-based influences from the west.

For the installation ritual, Zai played a Korean *changgu* (or *janggu*), an hourglass-shaped drum, with two heads, one usually struck with the hand, the other with a stick or ball-headed mallet. Assistants slowly circumambulated the boat and books. And Zai intoned a brief invocatory oration to convey the themes from the moral compass above.

So while the boat, on the one hand, represents the royal peregrinations or circuits of the realm of an Indic Buddhist prince from Palembang, the installation also, on the other hand, represents Zai's quest to not lose the stories of the smaller sea peoples, the *orang asli* (original peoples), *orang laut* (sea peoples), and *urak lavoi* (*orang lavoi*), whom he thinks of as having been colonized, oppressed, and nearly exterminated by his own ethnic group, the Bugis, who sent out colonies from Sulawesi across much of Southeast Asia's islands and littorals. In this endeavor he delves into traditional boat-making techniques and connects a series of his sculptures that look like the rib cages of horses or other animals, often with stones (books) hanging from them. In one, a stone serves as an animal's head "pointing towards justice." In one of several versions of this sculpture, it is placed in front of a painting (*Massacre*), and the two together are called *Fisherman Don't Feed and Weight the Pebbles to Feed Their Children* (plate 32). A horse, an inverted fishing boat, and a rib cage with stone head are transforms of the same topology. The horse points toward justice for the massacre of the indigenous people and ways of life. Zai comments on these transforms of horse, boat, and rib cage: "If you want to make something float you need a rib and [the Bugis] studied the ribs and they made a boat. . . . Feel your body. There is a center at the back. That is how the Bugis discovered how to make a ship. There must be a center and then something at the side. Beautiful actually" (Kuning [2013a]).

Zai has tried to support, and find venues for, the revival and maintenance of the *orang laut*'s old dance-drama. This is difficult for people who refuse as much as they can to participate in the money economy and try as much as

possible to stay off the grid, under the radar, and out of sight. He recalls as a child seeing such people fleetingly on the beach facing Batam island at Pasir Panjang, near Lorong Abu Kassim, the village in which he grew up. He says he had a dream about them, which set him off on his quest to recover their cultural history.

This cultural history entails a so far poorly reconstructed historical political economy, alluded to above. Three large-scale pre-European maritime networks intersect in Temasek or Singapore: Malay, Indian, and Chinese. But on a finer scale from the east, the *orang laut*, the Bugis, and other sea peoples cast their nets of settlements across islands and coast, often living on their boats and in stilt houses, as the *orang laut* do today. They coalesced at times into little sea states, maritime galactic polities, that waxed and waned with the fortunes of the taxes they could collect from their sometimes-minimalist ports, sometimes growing into bigger ports and sultanates.[18] They became the royal guards and even affines of thalassocratic sultans. In the seventeenth century, *orang laut* groups (*suku-suku*) were hierarchically organized under the sultan of Johor in alliances that protected them from their own internal rivalries as well. As far back as the empires of Majapahit on Java and Ayutthaya in Thailand, they provided warriors as well as pilots and shepherds of trade into ports, controlling the sea lanes (Chou 2010). Even the local vocabularies are redolent of global exchanges. The taxes in ports were collected by a *shabandar* (Persian, "port master"), *raja negara* (Malay, head of a populace), or *ketua orang laut* (headman of the *orang laut*).

Cynthia Gek-Hua Chou (2010) describes a central role of the *orang laut* in guarding Parameswara and bringing him from Srivijaya to Bintan, where the *orang laut* queen Wan Sri Benian greeted him with a fleet of four hundred ships. The *orang laut* then helped transfer him to Temasek (Singapore), where he assassinated the local Majapahit representative (the Sangaji, a title he himself had rejected, refusing to subordinate Srivijaya to Majapahit). He was then forced to flee Singapore owing to a counterattack by the Sangaji's father-in-law. So the *orang laut* shepherded Parameswara to the mouth of the Muar River (in today's Malaysia) and then to Malacca, where he established a new sultanate and initiated a marriage alliance with a family of *orang laut* that would continue for several generations. The *orang laut* would fight off the Acehnese and Portuguese in the service of Malacca, and when the Portuguese took Malacca in 1511, the *orang laut* again preserved the sultan, shepherding him and his retinue back to Singapore. But in the succession struggles after 1699, when Sultan Mahmud Syah was as-

sassinated, the *orang laut* refused to accept the usurpation of the sultanate by the Bendahara. So the latter called on the Bugis to replace the *orang laut*, first as mercenaries from the island of Bawean, and then intermarrying with them, so that they filled the role the *orang laut* had played in the earlier sultanate formation. Bugis ships plied the trade with Australia before the arrival of the English settlers. In Sulawesi, Bugis still maintain an important boatbuilding center today. They produce elegant hardwood luxury *pinisis* (a hybrid of Dutch and Portuguese sailing vessels with local boats) for regional and global elites, but in the past they built boats of all drafts and sizes, from sampans to multimast cargo ships and warships. Their cargo boats still ply the coasts of Nusantara (figures 5.10 and 5.11).

In the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries, these sea peoples (*orang laut* and Bugis, and others), it is said, could mobilize, at a moment's notice, tens of thousands of warriors to mount boats and enforce sovereignty or economic claims. Some of the Bugis ships that came to Singapore were said to be quite large, some adapting Chinese roll-up sails, easier to maneuver than Western ones. But locally, the *orang laut* mostly used sampans and small fishing vessels because the shallow seas of the Riau, Zai says, are "flat": "This sea doesn't have waves. It's flat. Waves would mean South China Sea, open sea. But these Malay people were living with flat water. Their boats are different, they don't need big ships. So that is the world I'm living with" (Kuning [2013?]). As a boy, Zai remembers jumping in boats all the time to visit various islands: "We are at home [in the sea], because that is our home. Few hundred islands, everything is our house. We can go here; we can go there. Mixed marriage here from this island and mixed marriage there. They're all mixed marriages. They kept moving here and there" (Kuning [2013a]).

In Singapore (Temasek), the Bugis settled up the Kallang River around what is today Kampong Glam, and the sultan established his palace there along the waterfront (now considerably inland). Three rivers (the Kallang, Rochor, and Geylang) converge to create the Kallang estuary, forming thus both a transshipment port for inland-ocean exchange and a base for the fleet of the Johor sultanate, as well as fishing territory for the *orang laut* stilt-house dwellers. (Independent Singapore would get the stilt-house dwellers to move by filling in the river with sand until the rationale for living in the river was gone—done in the name of land reclamation and modernity.) The name Bugis remains as that of an important commercial area and Metro interchange, with a colorful history from the 1950s to the 1980s of once being the street of transsexuals and partying sailors.

5.10 Bugis shipbuilding, Tanah Beru, Sulawesi, 2017. Photo: M. Fischer.

5.11 Bugis *pinisi* cargo ships offloading to trucks, Makassar, Sulawesi, 2017. Photo: M. Fischer.

The Singapore port seems to have gone through at least three cycles of settlement since the medieval trade with China, not counting earlier cycles.[19] In the fourteenth century, it was a key port for trade with the Yuan dynasty in China and declined with the Yuan's decline, becoming a home base for sea nomad "pirates" associated with the Malacca sultanate. The second cycle was after 1511 when the Portuguese took Malacca, and the sultanate moved to the Johor region, creating a *shabandar* in Singapore and continuing trade with Ming China. Portuguese trader Jacques de Coutre called it one of the best harbors in the Indies. It became a strategic site of contention between the Portuguese and the Dutch, and the Dutch East India Company's Admiral Cornelis Matelieff de Jong met with the Singapore *shabandar* to attempt to forge an alliance against the Portuguese. A major line of the Johor sultans moved their capital to Bintan in the Riau (today Indonesia, and a short ferry ride from Singapore) to better control the sea lanes of the Singapore Strait. The third cycle began with the 1819 arrival of the British. Kwa Chong Guan (2018), recounting these successive cycles, suggests, "Within the long cycles of trade, China, under the Tang, Song and Ming dynasties, has driven earlier cycles of trade and prosperity in the region. It was Yuan and Ming maritime trade which enabled in part the first and second cycles of settlement in Singapore. It appears that Singapore's current cycle of development may be dependent on access to China's market and the One Belt One Road which China is now pioneering."

Three overlapping directions of circuits of influence converge in Singapore: from the west, from Srivijaya (and later the Hadramaut in Yemen); from the east, from China; and from the southeast, the Austronesian or Austro-Polynesian colonization from Taiwan and Sulawesi (going as far west as Madagascar), represented in part by the Bugis diaspora.[20]

The Bugis also lay claim to scribal and literary history, which might also be represented by the books of Zai Kuning's installation. The transmission of knowledge occurred not only via Buddhist books from Srivijaya in the west but also from the Bugis' home in Sulawesi in the east. A historical panel near Arab Street in Singapore credits Bugis scribes for much of what survives today as written histories of Malaysia and the eastern islands:

> As they journeyed across the southern seas, the Bugis formed informal alliances with many kingdoms and sultanates. Literature was one way they integrated themselves into these cultures. Documents written by Bugis scribes tell of common ancestries and the role of the Bugis kings. The

most famous text of the region is the *I La Galigo*, which features the Bugis of Luwu at the northern end of the Bay of Bone (in Sulawesi). The Malay Annals (*Sejarah Melayu*) from the mid eighteenth-century and *The Precious Gift* (*Tuhfat al-Nafis*) which chronicles Johor-Riau from the fourteenth century to 1864 are among these Bugis documents.[21]

The books contain *ilmu*, a term with important double meanings. *Ilmu* means knowledge of the book-learning sort but also the magic of mantras and spells. The Qur'an is said to contain spells, so that is not necessarily a conflict. There are dueling traditions of Islamic and pre-Islamic magic (Skeat 1900; Chou 1994).

Zai's own life course as an artist is itself a social hieroglyph, calligraphically containing, in succeeding phases of his career, the outer voyage and inner journey of these cultural geographies. Zai was one of the early graduates of LaSalle College of the Arts (with a diploma in ceramic arts in 1989 and later with a B.A. conferred in cooperation with the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology in 1996), and his early theater and performance art developed in collaboration with two of Singapore's most storied artists and founders of key art institutions: theater director Kuo Pao Kun, who founded the Substation in the center of town in 1990, and performance artist Tang Da Wu, who founded The Artists' Village (TAV) in 1988 on a former farm in the outskirts (in Lorong Gamnbas, Sembawang), an artists' colony of which Zai became the first president in 1989.[22] Along the way, Zai went to Bali in 1989 to experience what was touted at the time as an ashram-like creative center run by Indonesian philosopher-novelist Sultan Takdir Alisjahbana (1908–94), which proved uninspiring, so he read a lot of Rumi and observed a lot of rituals and trance. When he returned to Singapore from Australia in 1996, he became the first resident artist at the Substation and started the Metabolic Theater Laboratory, a dance and "physical theater" company in which he could explore dance, physical movement, and ritual. Kuo Pao Kun at the time was introducing a variety of different kinds of theater exercises, and Kuo Pao Kun's wife, Goh Lay Kuan, a dancer and choreographer, contributed physical-culture exercises. Zai also credits Lut Ali, founder of the Tamil Teater Ekamatra, with helping him become a playwright in 1992.

The Substation in the 1990s was the vital center of art activities, particularly the informal garden in its side yard, where people would gather and try things out in an impromptu fashion; it was a place that Zai would try to save and reinvent before it was sold off.[23] The Substation is also where Zai invited

Tetsu Saitoh to explore their musical dialogues about cultural transmission. After seven years of directing Metabolic Theater Laboratory, Zai closed it down in 1999, to experience the freer life of a solo musician, performer, and painter. The music, partially available on video clips, ranged from avant-garde electronic music to classical guitar.

In 2001 TheatreWorks, another key theater company in Singapore run by Ong Ken Sen and Tay Tong, offered Zai a three-month residency. He proposed to use the residency to search for the *orang laut* who had once lived in Singapore and had been the oldest inhabitants of the 32,000 Riau Islands. This was easier said than done. He found the *orang laut* elusive, staying in no fixed place. The islanders in turn largely avoided them and feared them as having dark magical powers. Eventually he managed to be adopted by an *orang laut* family, who let him stay with them on Pulau Dendun (*pulau* means "island"). As one of these sea people told him sagely, "All of them talk about progress, but we tell ourselves that this is a curse which has fallen upon us and it is the end of us. We do not die immediately, but slowly" (Kuning 2017b, 32). He made a thirty-minute film, *Riau*, with handheld camera film clips he had shot through 2003. The music track was cowritten with Tetsu Saitoh. The film was a kind of farewell elegy to this way of life, and he gave up visiting, feeling despair at the inability to help.

But the film—one of seven films Zai has made—premiered at TheatreWorks and was purchased by the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, in part with the goal of providing him with funds to continue.[24] Gilles Massot, a professor at LaSalle School of the Arts, who was writing a book about the island of Bintan (Massot 2003), alerted Zai to the existence of a troupe of *mak yong* opera, or masked dance-drama, performers on Pulau Matang or Matang Island. Ironically, Matang was only a fifteen-minute boat ride away from Pulau Dendun, where Zai had been staying. The full version of the opera had not been performed for two decades. Only an abbreviated half-hour segment had been performed, commissioned by the Riau Provincial Government, for a folklore event. A full production was expensive for a community basically living outside the money economy: twenty-five people would have to reduce their fishing or other work and memorize parts over five days of rehearsals, all for a two-hour performance.

Fascinated, Zai renewed his quest to discover the cultural worlds of the *orang laut*. He begged, borrowed, and raised money for a full-scale production and tried to find venues and funding for a few subsequent productions.

One of these, comprising three tales, was performed in Singapore at the 2010 Night Festival organized by TheatreWorks.[25] Again in 2013 he was able to bring the troupe to Singapore and, with a grant from the National Arts Council, was able to film the show at the Institute for Contemporary Art. By this time the old troupe leader, Pak Khalid (d. 2009), had been replaced by a younger man, Pak Gani. On New Year's Eve in 2017, with funds from his Venice Biennale commission in hand, Zai returned to Matang Island once more to watch a production with a new generation of actors.

Generational renewal was exciting. So was the discovery of deep regional connections, not only to Kelantan (northeast Malaysia) but to the southeastern Phatthalung province of Thailand. On Pulau Matang he had brought along a Thai assistant who recognized the masks used there as the same as those used in his home village in Phatthalung, Thailand. He took Zai to Phatthalung to see. Although the term *mak yong* is also known in Malaysia (named in 2005 a UNESCO intangible cultural heritage), it is done there without masks (and is banned in public by the Islamic state government).[26] Zai argues (and the ethnographic literature agrees) that the dance-drama originates in Thailand. There are not only masks but also shamanic, healing, and Buddhist meanings. There is even a Buddhist temple dedicated to the dance-drama. Further confirmation is the name *menora*, used in Thailand for the performance: it is the mythic half-woman, half-bird (*manhora*) from the Buddhist Jataka tales. Back on Matang, Zai was now told that the masked dance-drama had come decades earlier from Singapore. In Singapore, Zai tracked down some old people in the Bedok neighborhood who remembered seeing it in the 1920s or 1930s. In Penang, a *menora* performance tradition is described with the note that these dance-dramas were handed down in families and that Hokkien-speaking clowns were added to make the dance-drama more accessible to the Penang Chinese community (Tan S.-B. 1988; see also Ginsburg 1972; Kershaw 1982; Yousof 1982).

So now it made sense to track these cultural bits back to Palembang and Bukit Seguntang, where Sang Sapurba (or Sri Trimurti Tri Buana, or Sri Nila Pahlawan) descended from the sky, becoming the ancestor of the Dapunta Hyang (the "first Malay king"), Parameswara (the "last Malay king" of Srivijaya and the "founder of Singapore"), and all the Malay sultanates (today the kingdoms of Malaysia).[27] Zai visited the seven tombs at Bukit Seguntang, noting they were inscribed with the Buddhist rhombus forms that he would use on the books carried by the ghost ship. Incense sticks indicated the tombs were still active pilgrimage sites, and he found an old woman rit-

ualist who practiced there. At the foot of Bukit Seguntang, an inscription in Pallava script and Old Malay says that in the year Saka 606, in the month of Caitra (the first Hindu month, i.e., March), the Srikestra park, with fruit trees and ponds, was created by Sri Jayanasa for the use of all people and creatures. It ends with the donor's wishes for all to enjoy the garden's fruits and also to pursue *bodhi* (awakening), the three jewels (right thought, knowledge, and conduct; or buddha, dharma, and sangha), and diamond-like determined mindfulness, following the example of the Mahasattvas. "Listen to the voice of Brahma! Attain enlightenment!"[28] The Buddhist and Sanskrit heritage is reaffirmed in the names that populate these foundation stories, appropriated now as charter myths for Malay Muslim sultanates and kingdoms, mixed with Bugis and other genealogies.

The rattan boat bound together with red string and beeswax takes on increasing symbolic density. It evokes boatbuilding techniques without nails, using only natural materials such as soft and flexible rattan to provide tensile pliability. The red string provides binding and knotting but also signifies bloodlines. The beeswax, an embalming material, coats the ship and books, turning them into relics. The rhombus, sampan boat, cupped hand, and vulva (birth, rebirth) are Buddhist motifs. The crossing of the ocean is another Buddhist motif. The rattan ship, then, is as if exhumed or raised from the ocean, only the ribs remaining thanks to the wax making them water and soil-microbe resistant. "So many condemned boats, abandoned ships can be seen around the islands of Bintan and Batam. . . . Houses on stilts collapse . . . so a skeleton ship seemed natural as if it has survived some kind of battle." The ship is a cultural survivor, relic, and reliquary. The writings, conceptually referenced in the wax-covered books, Zai muses, for a thousand years were in Sanskrit, before that language was replaced in the fifteenth century by Arabic-derived scripts (Jawa) and in the eighteenth century by Latin script.

The boat is a storytelling instrument, and as theater studies scholar Alvin Eng Hui Lim, present at the Venice launch, notes: "Zai was not interested in being the representative 'Singaporean artist.' Instead, we spoke privately about the birth, the enlightenment and the death of Buddha on Vesak Day (10 May 2017). . . . This vessel spoke of a pre-Islamic history and the narrative of Dapunta Hyang and the Srivijaya empire. Yet it also spoke of Zai's biography in relation to those of his adopted family and friends on islands. *Dapunta Hyang* performed a tentative soundscape, possessed by the multiple stories and displaced spirits that make up the incomplete vessel."

Zai himself says in a video from Venice, "I don't necessarily represent Singapore. I represent the Southeast Asian peoples' experience, who want to connect with everybody. It's not about race, it is about the consciousness of things, that is what we are in Singapore" (Kuning 2017d). Wanting to connect with everybody is not just a mercantile or political alliance-building necessity but also anchored in sea peoples' nomadic way of life. In conversation with me, Zai said:

> Asking them where they come from is a very annoying question for them, I come from here, I come from there, I come from over there. Actually at the end, they say everywhere is my house, so I can't answer you, I'm from here. For them everywhere is a home, they just move around, and home is not a house, and home is not an island, all these are considered their home. If I am not in this house, I will be in that house, in that river stilt houses, with their relatives, an uncle, someone they married with, a kind of kinship map—that is the geography. . . . It is a, don't know to use the words, a logic or not. [MF: Yes, a cultural logic.]

Recall the title of his performance-installation with the reflective mirror, polished steel, like a shallow sea, *We Are Home and Everywhere*.

Storytelling is indeed one of the points of the artwork, for children, but also to teach parents how to tell stories, a vital pedagogy parents are losing:

> Oral history or storytelling is one of the parts of the project: that I would give workshops, work with children and parents; my wife also gives workshops with children. . . . It is not necessarily [only] for the children, it is *also for the parents to learn how to tell stories.* You have to exercise [this skill]. When I worked with [Kuo] Kao Pun . . . we talked about this a lot, about how we cannot depend on country history, family history, stories based on books, on what the government decides as history, we *have to create* a certain *culture from more storytelling*. The father did not use to read storybooks but tell story about *my* background, about *my* grandfather. . . . During the early days [with Kao Pun] we realized [the problem] would slowly become worse. Parents now are very lazy to tell stories, sometimes they are embarrassed. And sometime even if they want to tell stories, they tell lies: you know, "Your grandfather can carry fifty kilograms of load," but in fact they only carry ten. He kill two hundred people, just him alone, when actually he just killed two persons. This becomes problematic for city people, especially now. I'm afraid the iPad be-

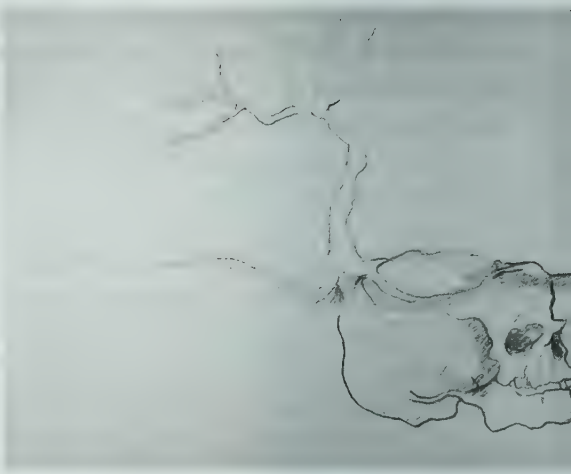
come the storyteller for kids, parents really have no time, not inspired to tell *their* stories. And those stories and memories make, I think, *make the person*, the individual, become *more imaginative*, *more connected* to certain culture in thinking, and when they look at something, they can imagine it even more than the normal. (author's interview)

I HAVE TO CREATE MY OWN FLOOR TO PERFORM

In 2020–21 Zai turned his attention to the Mah Meri, one of the eighteen recognized indigenous peoples of West Malaysia, saying he was now less interested in *orang asli* or *orang laut* as identity politics but more interested in their even more endangered animism, their pre-Islamic arts, the songs and masks used in their rituals. He did drawings in the mornings as exercises, as "a beginning of my coming activity" often of local masks (figure 5.12). A Mah Meri wooden mask with horns, he says, was affixed to a wall next to his pencil drawings. One drawing is of four mandrakes growing from two skulls and a tree holding up a house next to the head of a child with a flower in her hair, and, alongside, some brown nuts and red fruits from the forest.[29] Some are "imagination run wild," such as a tree growing from and seemingly embracing a buried human skull (figure 5.13), and there is a brilliant piece from June 26, marked "ok done for morning exercise" in which masks are enmeshed in mandrake roots, and small boats are held up to the sky by mandrake trunks and branches (figure 5.14).[30] In March 2021 he put on an exhibit, *Projek Orang Asli*, or more informally what he calls *The Indigenous Project*, with Samri Abdul Rahman and Ronnie Bahari (two Mah Meri wood carvers) at the Substation in Singapore. Once again, Zai Kuning shows a probing mind that is beyond capture by the tourist or museum markets but searches for ways of thinking about stewardship of the environment and refuses to collapse the identities of Muslim and Malay into a hegemonic one erasing a minority one.[31]

IN CONCLUSION

In sum, Zai's artworks, like Atok's last concert, attempt to listen to the resonances of *artwork as cultural commentary*, consciousness-raising, and ethos altering. It explores artworks as performative, rather than themselves hermeneutic. That is, as Zai put it, "*I have to create my own floor to per-*



5.12 (*left*) Zai Kuning, mask sketch, Venice Biennale catalog, 2017.

5.13 (*right*) Zai Kuning, ancestor sketch, Zai Kuning's Facebook page, June 27, 2020.

form"; it is often in the postshow dialogue, question-and-answer session, forum, or talkback that the symbolic densities are unpacked and made more available. The attempt to teach parents as well as their children *how to tell stories* is an important mode of stimulating creativity, thinking outside the box of rules and regulations, and finding voice and purpose in the chaotic turmoil of the world. Too often, Zai worries, personal histories are no longer told by parents to their children, allowing state ideologies and formulaic school history books to substitute and deaden access to emotion and meaning-filled lived experience. The recollection of history, as Zai puts it, is not just history but also consciousness and mindfulness of the bioecological and sociocultural worlds we inhabit and interact with. Marshall Sahlins's bon mot applies: "History is not just a foreign country. It is a relationship among countries" (2004, 103). Understanding historical thalassocracies, maritime galactic polities, cross-communicating "Mediterraneans" or "Nusantaras," and sea people's nomadic ways of life can become keys to accessing natural and human geographies, understanding how we got here, how to proceed in finer-grained ways of flourishing, and perhaps how to avoid repetitions of hubristic pleonexias.[32] Old and new cultural forms can open *worlds of sen-*

5.14 Zai Kuning, ancestor masks in mangrove with boats held aloft, Zai Kuning's Facebook, June 26, 2020.

soria and renewal: experimental music, trance-inducing ritual, mandalas of spiritual cosmogeographies, film, dance-dramas, new sculptural forms with old techniques and natural materials—all are Zai's media.

The various images of Zai Kuning's artworks about Dapunta Hyang, the sea nomads, acoustic music that carries over the water "just like talking," and masks and folk opera over time constitute a vivid documentation of how installations evolve over many exhibits. They also are a reminder of the calligraphic power of strings and sticks, as well as line drawings. Zai shows transformations: (a) how rhombus forms—lozenge, boat, cupped hand, or vulva—signify life's rebirths, knowledge transmission, offerings, and other meanings; (b) more subtly, how horse rib cages and boats are transforms; (c) how scales of justice and books hanging from strings are transforms and can at times stand as witness to and accuser for the injustices of massacre and cultural genocide (see again plate 34); and (d) how strings, beeswax, and rattan sticks can demonstrate tensile, pliable strength and conceptual power. His new drawing exercises anticipate explorations of the interconnections between the worlds below and above, entwining Mah Meri masks and the interconnectivities of ecological living.

"Pak Ngah Balik": The song compares Pak Ngah (middle uncle) to the luminescence of the midnight moon as he returns to his lover. In the second part of the song, he tells his lover not to worry; although he is leaving again, it will not be for long.

"Seri Mersing": Mersing, a port town at the tidal mouth of a river in Johor, is the subject of many songs ("the beaches are clean, and Johor thrives"); *seri* means "glow" or "shine." In the first verse, a song of Seri Mersing composed in the past is invoked; the second verse describes the sadness of an orphan; the third verse contains the above tribute to the town; and the fourth verse gives thanks.

"Siti Payong" (Girl with Umbrella): The first couplet provides metaphors of the inability to control fate: if one tries to put out a fire, soot will scatter everywhere; a paddle will break if used in the wrong direction; the lover does not want to separate, but fate is in God's hand. The lover likens his love for Siti to winding a thread into a cone as high as a mountain; Siti Payong's character is so refined, she is unforgettable.

"Nasib Panjang": Three places are described (Pasir Panjang, Teok Belangah, and Pulau Sentosa), and feelings of longing: love is like a flower; a month's absence can feel like a year.

"Sayang Musalmah": Musalmah with a gold ornament in her hair goes to plant in the paddy; it is easier to carry pots of gold than the weight of not repaying a favor; crops planted can be sold, but too many favors owed can lead to destruction.

"Gurindam Jiwa": Two lovers promise eternal love; if she passes away first, he will wait at heaven's gate for her. (*Gurindam* is a form of two couplets, the last word of each rhyme. *Jiwa* is "soul": so, poetry of the soul.)

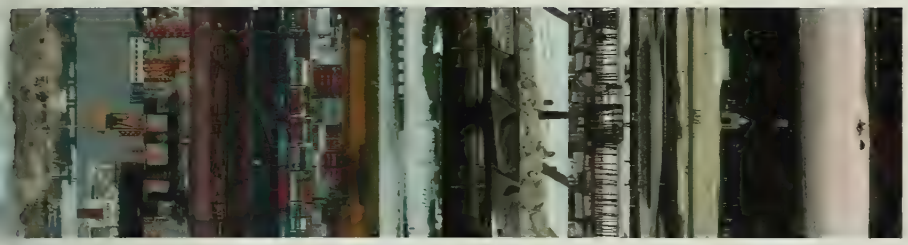


Plate 1 Charles Lim, *Sandwich*. Video and Diasec-mounted photo. Courtesy of Charles Lim.

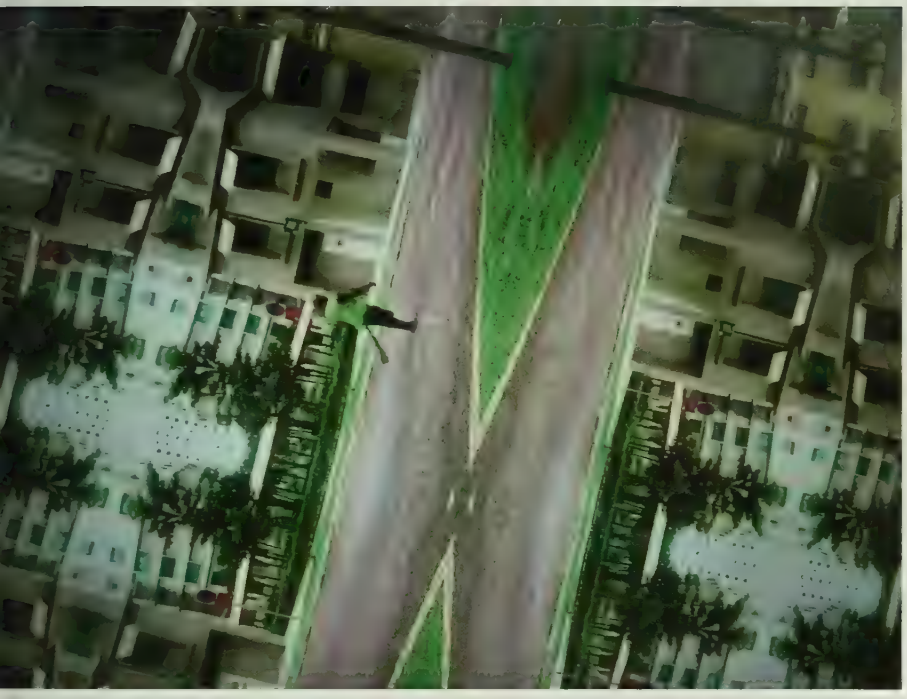


Plate 2 Charles Lim, *Safe Seas*. Video screenshot by M. Fischer. Courtesy of Charles Lim.

Plate 3 Zai Kuning, installation view, *Dapunta Hyang: Transmission of Knowledge*, Singapore Pavilion, Fifty-Seventh Venice Biennale, Italy, 2017 (solo presentation). Courtesy of Zai Kuning and Ota Fine Arts, Singapore, Tokyo, Shanghai.

Plate 4 Zai Kuning, red string bindings of rattan ship *Dapunta Hyang*, Gillman Barracks, 2017. Photo: M. Fischer.

Plate 5 Zai Kuning, beeswax-covered books carried on *Dapunta Hyang*, Gillman Barracks, 2017. Photo: M. Fischer.

Plate 6 Anteroom, Galeri Nasional Indonesia, Jakarta: Entang Wiharso's *No Hero No Cry*, 2006–7, on left wall; Sally Smart's *The Exquisite Pirate (Java Sea)*, 2016, on right wall. Photo courtesy of Sally Smart.

Plate 7 Entang Wiharso, *No Hero No Cry*, 2006–7. Acrylic, spray paint on canvas mounted on aluminum, variable dimensions. Photo: M. Fischer.

Plate 8 Entang Wiharso, *Reclaim Paradise—Paradise Lost No. 2*, 2015. Aluminum, car paint, resin, thread, graphite, steel, silicon, electrical cable, 290 × 500 × 800 cm. Courtesy of Entang Wiharso.

Plate 9 Entang Wiharso, *The Other Dream: I Love You Too Much*, 2011–15. Aluminum, car paint, resin, color pigment, thread, car headlights, 275 × 400 cm. Courtesy of Entang Wiharso.

Plate 10 Entang Wiharso, *Behind American Dreams*, No. 1, 2012–15. Aluminum, car paint, resin, color pigment, thread, teakwood, variable dimensions. Courtesy of Entang Wiharso.

Plate 11 Entang Wiharso, *Promising Land—Migration*, 2015. Steel, resin, car paint, color pigment, thread, television monitor, 300 × 250 cm. Courtesy of Entang Wiharso.

Plate 12 Entang Wiharso, *A Thousand KM*, 2014–15. Aluminum, car paint, resin, color pigment, thread, teakwood, variable dimensions. Courtesy of Entang Wiharso.

Plate 13 Entang Wiharso, *Chronic Satanic Privacy* and young woman, Galeri Nasional Indonesia, Jakarta. Photo: M. Fischer.

Plate 14 Entang Wiharso, *Sound of Garden: Delicate Machine*, 2015. Aluminum, car paint, resin, color pigment, thread, 300 × 700 cm. Courtesy of Entang Wiharso.

Plate 15 Entang Wiharso, *Coalition: Never Say No*, 2015. Aluminum, car paint, 200 × 300 cm. Courtesy of Entang Wiharso.

Plate 16 Sally Smart, *Puppets*, 2016. Mixed media lighting and sound. Installation view, Galeri Nasional Indonesia, Jakarta. Courtesy of Sally Smart.

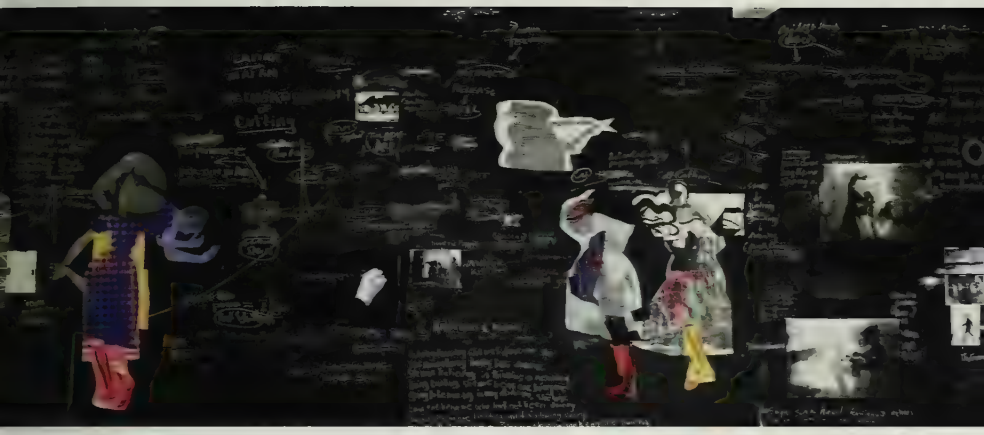


Plate 17 Sally Smart, *I Build My Time (Pertunjukan)*, 2016. Various mixed media elements including moving image, chalk, and Conté on painted blackboard wall. Installation view, Galeri Nasional Indonesia, Jakarta. Courtesy of Sally Smart.

Plate 18 Sally Smart, *The Exquisite Pirate Figure #2*, 2005. Collage elements on paper, 76 × 56 cm. Courtesy of Sally Smart.

Plate 19 Sally Smart, *The Exquisite Pirate (Oceania)*, 2009. Synthetic polymer paint, ink, foil, and collage on canvas, 550 × 1,000 cm (variable). Courtesy of Sally Smart.

Plate 20 Sally Smart, *The Choreography of Cutting/The Pedagogical Puppet*, 2012, 2015. Digital photographic print mounted on aluminum, each 78 × 58 cm. Installation view, Galeri Nasional Indonesia, Jakarta. Courtesy of Sally Smart.

Plate 21 Entang Wiharso, *Feast Table—Being Guest*, 2014–15. Aluminum, car paint, resin, color pigment, thread, steel, teakwood, 180 × 400 × 170 cm. Courtesy of Entang Wiharso.

Plate 22 Charles Lim, *Inside/Outside*. (*SEA STATE 1*), 2010–11. Courtesy of Charles Lim.

Plate 23 Charles Lim, Sajahat Buoy (*SEA STATE 2*). Screenshot (video). Courtesy of Charles Lim.

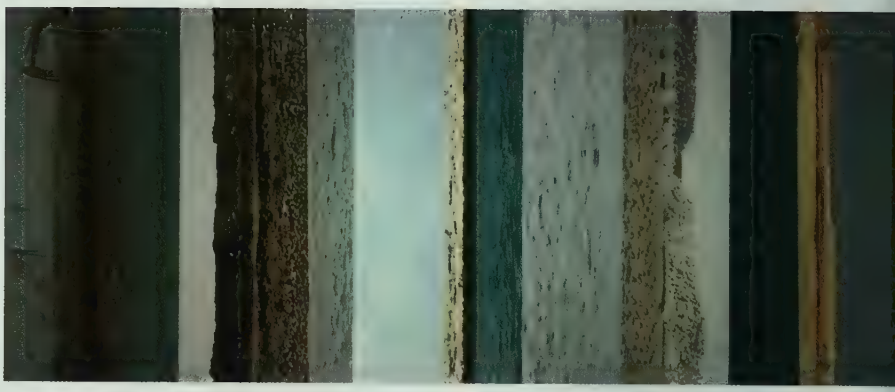


Plate 24 Charles Lim, *Sandwich* (sea mining), (*SEA STATE 2* and *SEA STATE 7*). Courtesy of Charles Lim.

Plate 25 Charles Lim, *Sandwich* (detail: mechanized sea mining) (*SEA STATE 7*). Courtesy of Charles Lim.

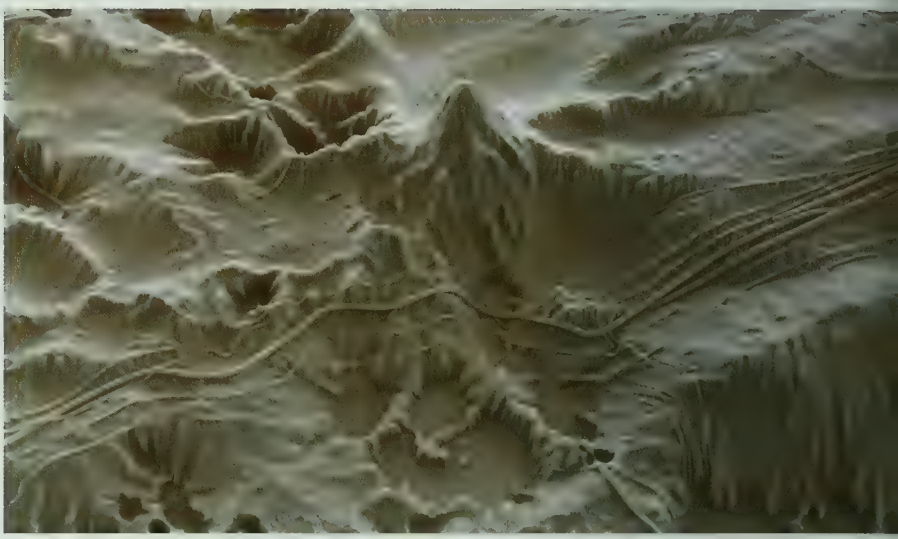


Plate 26 Charles Lim, *Inversion* (*SEA STATE 3*), 3D printing. Courtesy of Charles Lim.

Plate 27 Charles Lim, *Capsize* (*SEA STATE 6*), plasma-screen video. Courtesy of Charles Lim.

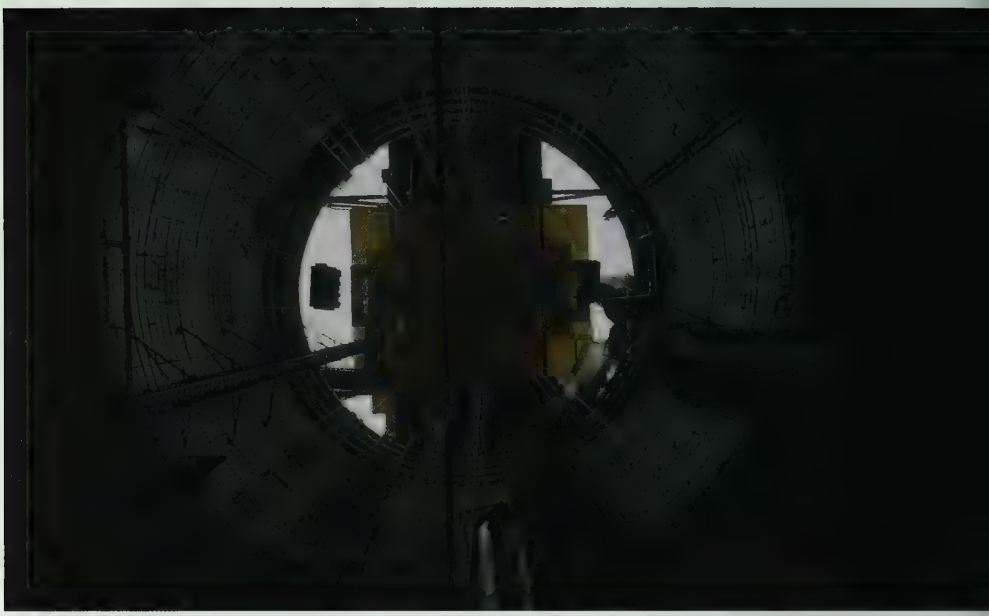


Plate 28 Charles Lim, *Cavern* (*SEA STATE 6*), plasma-screen video. Courtesy of Charles Lim.

Plate 29 Charles Lim, Sailboat in *Cavern* (*SEA STATE 6*), plasma-screen video. Courtesy of Charles Lim.

Plate 30 Zai Kuning, *We Are Home and Everywhere*, 2014. Courtesy of Ota Fine Arts, Singapore, Tokyo, Shanghai.

Plate 31 Zai Kuning, *Losing Oneself to Be with It*, performance, Venice International Performance Art Week, 2014. Photo courtesy of Monika Deimling.

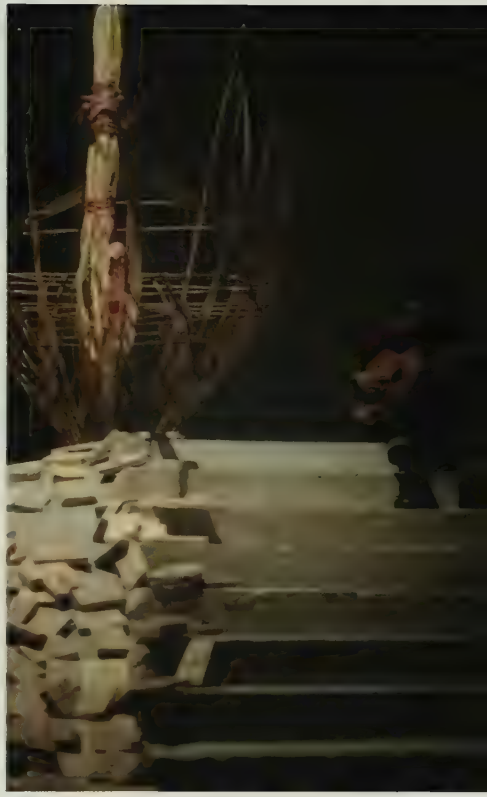


Plate 32 Zai Kuning, *Fishermen Don't Feed and Weight the Pebbles to Die* and *Massacre*, Singapore Biennale, 2015. Rattan, string, and stone, drawing on paper. Photo: M. Fischer.

Plate 33 Zai Kuning, *Transmission of Knowledge*, *Secret Archipelago*, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, 2015 (group exhibition). Courtesy of Ota Fine Arts, Singapore, Tokyo, Shanghai.

Plate 34 Entang Wiharso, *Flag of Surrender*, 2021. Acrylic, glitter, polyurethane, 205 × 600 cm. Courtesy of Entang Wiharso.

Plate 35 Entang Wiharso, *Rope from the Sky*, 2021. Acrylic, glitter, polyurethane, 205 × 600 cm. Courtesy of Entang Wiharso.

6

Raw Moves and Layered Communication across the Archipelago Seas

Until boats came along and the craft of meditation was forever lost.
—SANSKRIT TEXT, INVOKED IN KIRIN KUMAR'S *ARCHIPELAGO ARCHIVES*

The body is the only archive of the physical memories of dance.
What remains in documentation is often dead.
—PADMINI CHETTUR, INDIAN CHOREOGRAPHER AND DANCE INNOVATOR

The body-mind of the dancer becomes a *palimpsest of past origami*, so distant, almost ancient, carrying only memory in its creases.
—KIRIN KUMAR (PROGRAM NOTES, *ARCHIPELAGO ARCHIVES,* JUNE 2017)

Dance has only intuition and inference; it is a language beyond language.
—GELING YANG, *GREEN SNAKE* (IN YANG 1999)

INTRODUCTION

Archipelago Archives Exhibit #7: If I Could Set with the Sun was for me one of those totally immersive and absorbing performances and installations that open a number of doors to different worlds, philosophies, technologies, and experimental modes of understanding the complications of the contemporary world. This is art that is not easily pigeonholed or categorized in the traditional sense; it is neither culturally particular nor just globally mobile culture nor merely a deeply personal quest. It is all of these things. Kiran Ku-

mar, its conceptualizer and director, calls it a "durational performance" (interview, June 10–11, 2017). He is an interdisciplinary artist who focuses on the intersection of artistic and scientific modes of articulation in dance and somatic practices. Like most other pieces discussed in this volume, it is part of a larger series of explorations and developments along two axes: that of an evolving artist's corpus and that in conversation with other bodies of artworks. The three-hour durational performance of dance and video that I saw was done with two dancers from the RAW Moves performance company in Singapore, where Kumar did a residency to develop it.[1] It was performed at the Goodman Arts Centre on June 10–11, 2017.

Kiran Kumar is not the only artist working on such recoveries, reinventions, and reworkings of traditions within dance forms, and I juxtapose his work with those of others I've been following in Singapore both at RAW Moves (especially the work of Edith Podesta, whose *Indices of Vanishment*, also in 2017, follows a husband and wife through the last day of packing before their HDB [Housing Development Board] flat is demolished) and at the very different Apsaras Arts Dance Company, which does spectacular multimedia narrative productions of Bharatanatyam and, more relevant here, has convened a series of festivals and conversations with preeminent Indian dance practitioners about the evolution of classical Indian dance forms and how their appeal can be opened up to broader and new-generation audiences.[2]

For me, Kumar's durational performance is part of two larger inquiries. One of these is rediscovering and developing different expressive modalities of bodily movement that have been covered over, obscured, and frozen by modernist codifications of "traditional" classical dance. This is partly historical recovery based on ethnographic fieldwork and partly experimental studio work. This is, of course, similar to what, for instance, the Kalakshetra training academy did, initiated in 1936 by Rukmini Devi Arundale in Madras. Having studied ballet, she, a theosophist, wanted to preserve the spiritual practices of Indian dance, but anticipating that society would become more and more secular, she focused on technique and form, ironically helping to foster the very secularization that she intended to counter (Meduri 2001, 109). Her system of teaching Bharatanatyam dance became canonical, if not the only one, and was what some in later generations reacted against as "frozen" or insufficiently versed in anatomical knowledge.

The second, complementary, inquiry and discovery process is more geographically expansive, illuminating the affinities, variations, and dialogic dif-

ferences of dance philosophies across the "archipelago" of the Indian Ocean that disseminated outward from the Chola Empire (today Tamil Nadu), the Kalinga Empire (Orissa), and the Srivijaya Empire (southern Sumatra), eventually reaching as far as Cham in Vietnam and back through the Khmer Empire (Angkor Wat) and Thailand (Ayutthaya) to Burma (Mandalay). In his explorations Kiran Kumar evokes a conceptual continuum of differences in expressing strength and grace between often more vigorous, staccato, and foot-stamping Indian dance styles and the gentler, smoother dance styles of central Java.

This geographically expansive inquiry is also being pursued in a quite different idiom by the dance company Apsaras Arts in Singapore. While Kumar pursues a more modern dance, movement art, and yogic style of exploration, Apsaras Arts takes Bharatanatyam dance troupes onto the big stage with film backdrops and soaring music, integrating dancers, music, and languages from across South and Southeast Asia. The precision of the dancing yields nothing to the modern media and remains the essence of the effort to reach out to larger audiences narratively as well as in performance style. Apsaras Arts was founded in 1977 by Shri (S.) Sathyalingam Suntharalingam and Shrimati (Smt) Neila Sathyalingama, a music teacher and a dancer from Kalakshetra. Since 2005 it has been led by Sri Lanka–born artistic director Aravinth Kumarasamy. Among his most important productions are five: *Nirmanika: The Beauty of Architecture* (2011), in which the famous carvings of dancers on temple walls come to life, animating the foundational Sanskrit *shastra* of architecture, theater, and dance; *Anjasa ["The Path"]: The Wonder of Buddhist Monuments* (2015), which with film backgrounds takes us on a tour of the Buddha's life and Buddhist monuments from Nepal to India, Indonesia, Cambodia, Thailand, and Burma; *A Glimpse of Angkor: Quest for Immortality* (2013) and *Angkor: The Untold Story* (2016), which ask why a Shaivite complex should have a central monument to Vishnu; and the more contemporary concerns of *Agathi: The Plight of the Refugee* (2017), partly a reflection on the flight of Kumarasamy's family from the civil war in Sri Lanka. In an article titled "Can Bharatanatyam Tell Painful Stories of Rape and Migration? A Dance Company Provides an Answer" (2018), Malini Nair describes *Agathi* as filling the stage with dark (instead of bright) colors, male dancers (instead of primarily female ones), and expressions of terror and hopelessness (instead of smiles) and telling of crises tearing families from their homes and tossing them into dangerous seas, prisons, and the hands of tyrants.

I return to some of these differences between full-dress Bharatanatyam and minimalist movement performance in the concluding section. Kiran Kumar calls his larger project the *Archipelago Archives* and locates this "archipelago" as an imagined "somewhere between India and Indonesia" (interviews, June 10–11, 2017). He speaks of the dance-making process itself as "part reconstructive, part speculative, part archaeological, part *anthropological,* and part fantastical." About the "archipelago," he says, "Well, it is its own archipelago, imagining it came from navigation maps drawn at different times, there were sometimes a few islands erroneously drawn, and then in later versions removed, and they got this name of phantom islands. So it is this idea, actually crossing the tropes. I came across this notion in Berlin of 'imaginative ethnography.' Imagining this place and then constructing the dances more or less through ethnographic processes."

Imaginary Ethnographies is the title of a 2012 book by the literary critic and member of the Center for Ethnography at the University of California, Irvine, Gabriele Schwab, who reads literature as "anthropologies of the future," a form of rereading old iconic characters and plots as dynamic modes of "writing culture," challenging habitual modes of thought. There is also a Center for Imaginative Ethnography based in Canada, with five curators and some fifty members around the world, which takes "imaginative and experimental ethnography as points of departure—an invitation to live differently, to animate spaces, classrooms, and stages, to listen carefully to the lives of others, to use humor and imagination to write, picture, and perform the world alive" and which explicitly situates "imaginative ethnography" in "close proximity to performance studies" (http://imaginativeethnography.org/welcome/). These wonderfully felicitous "crossing[s] [of] the tropes" thus situate Kirin Kumar more broadly than only in lineages of dance and performance studies, or they ipso facto situate those lineages in more expansive questions. His *Archipelago Archives* is an ongoing set of discovery and reinvention processes embedded in the aesthetic milieus of South and Southeast Asia.

Thinking of my interactions with the artworks of Zai Kuning (chapter 5)—another musician and performance and installation artist, also engaged in recovery and experimental discovery, working with the Melayu, Bugis, and *orang laut* (sea peoples) and the trance dances and opera forms of the Malay world—I asked Kumar if he thought of also exploring these Malay and Austronesian/Polynesian/Melanesian forms that have moved westward across the Malaysian world and become interlayered with Hindu-Buddhist

dispersions. He responded by stressing the ongoing nature of his exploration: "I'm doing this [these studies, performances, studio works, and installations] within the process, so it is not the end of the process. . . . The process [fieldwork and translation into studio experimental form] [is open-endedly] important, because I can take the artwork back into the research. Otherwise, it turns out to be too much of a culmination or container. So I haven't visited a lot of such places, I haven't visited Acheh, for instance, [although] I was trying [to find dancers there]"[3] (interviews, June 10–11, 2017).

The *anthropological* part for him has so far involved two extended periods of *fieldwork* in South India and in Java. In the first Kumar traveled with linguistic anthropologist Saskia Kersenboom in January 2017 down along the Kaveri river and delta, looking for the *tandava* (masculine) and *lasya* (feminine) dances associated with Shiva temples (and perhaps with tantric forms of South Indian Buddhism that spread to Sumatra and Thailand). In this he partly follows the explorations of earlier dancers, but instead of tracing a court-patronized devadasi system of temple worship, he looks to more widespread village practices as well.[4]

His work follows such earlier famed breakthrough Indian dancer-choreographers as Chandralekha Prabhudas Patel (1928–2006), known by her first name, who metabolized training techniques from Yoga and Kalaripayattu (the Kerala martial arts) into Bharatanatyam and pursued abstraction and eroticizing of the latter to create novel body-and-movement dance; her student Padmini Chettur (b. 1970), who stresses the importance of learning anatomy and is dismayed at the lack of attention to this in Kalakshetra training; and Jayachandran Palazhy, founder of the Attakkalari Centre for Movement Arts in Bangalore. They all broke away from codified Bharatanatyam and Odissi dancing to create new performance languages.[5] Following Chandralekha, Kumar, too, argues that the so-called classical dance forms were codified and frozen only in the early twentieth century. Kumar argues that these codified forms have lost contact with their earlier transformative force and particularly the tantric-erotic expressiveness of dance and its performativity—what it accomplishes in the dancers and audience, and particularly its pure communicative force with divinity and with the performers' own interiority. Kumar, when he talks, deploys the exquisite forms of dance with his arms, hands, and body to illustrate his concepts and ideas. So, too, Padmini Chettur (2017; also using her hands, arms, and body in dance-informed expression as she talks) argues that the *guru-shisya* teaching method has decayed (her first gurus were men who could not dance

but sat on the floor holding their staffs and giving directions). In the Singapore symposium hosted by Aravinth Kumarasamy and Apsaras Arts, the point was made that what has now also disappeared with the *guru-shisya* is the support system that protected young dancers against more experienced musicians who might upstage them.

The other fieldwork, in 2016 and 2017, was to learn the *alus* meditative qualities in the palace dance traditions of central Java. *Alus* ("soft male," or "refined," gentle and slow, but with seemingly effortless powerful strength) is the quality with which even warriors are said to be imbued. Arjuna is the iconic role model. In the *Mahabharata*, during the year of his exile at the court of Virata, Arjuna disguised himself as a female dancer, taking the name Brihannala (or Wrihatnolo in Javanese), and taught dance to the princess. Kumar himself danced Arjuna's role in 2017 in Surakarta.

In *Study #7* (or *Exhibit #7*, or *Study #3*, as it is labeled on the RAW Moves website), the performance described below, the result of a five-week residency and collaboration with two dancers of the RAW Moves dance company of Singapore, is described by Kumar in his program notes as "studio-based explorations to seek a composite form drawn from a continuum of dance traditions between the Odissi and Javanese," and as translating ethnographic observations from the field (titled, respectively, *Study #4* and *Study #6*) into artistic strategies for studio practice. Two guiding philosophies seamlessly fuse: *alus, the quality of slowing down in order to transcend*, and *hatha yoga*'s focus on posture (*asana*), breath modulation (*pranayama*), and mindfulness (*dhyana*) that provides a "communication platform" for the dance team.[6] He goes on to write, "By modulation of breath and gaze, and isolating movements, the dancer constructs pathways for her or his body-mind to inhabit shape and renders dance a moving meditation. It is not deliberately folding into shape. Rather the body-mind of the dancer becomes a *palimpsest of past origami*, so distant, almost ancient, carrying only memory in its creases" (program notes, *Archipelago Archives*, June 10–11, 2017).

When I asked about his role in conceptualizing, composing, or scoring the piece I witnessed after commenting on the two dancers separately (Jeryl Lee's extraordinary control when she was doing the namaste behind her back and Matthew Goh's muscular physique and ability ever so slowly to torque his entire body, feet flat on the ground, in his opening, rotating slowly through poses you might see in sculptures on temple walls), wondering if they fit together in some dialogic way, Kumar somewhat surprised me by commenting, "They have independent scores":

> We used meditation techniques as a choreographic basis. So instead, what would be an object, to meditate on, becomes a dance. So the dance is essentially the object, and the process of doing it is meditation. And for them, some of the dances are images, some of them are short narratives, so they have something to fall back on *when that process of focus strays, but otherwise the movement is just the being here.*[7] When it is, it may start with the fish, for example, or the image of a fish from a narrative or something, but then it comes back to the hand grazing the surface of the water, the second one touching, pressing deeper. Their attention is always with the present moment, and that creates obviously a very different dance for each one. . . . When the through line is the meditation . . . in all of these forms, *every limb, every joint that can be articulated is articulated.* And so then the body is always, so the attention can be spread out throughout. Whereas *if you let something* [an arm or a hand] *fall* or slip, then the premise is that *you can't give the tip* [of the fingers] *tension*. So that's the basis of the form. And then when you move the element of dancing to music, the external cognitive being fed with the musical structure, then you just, I feel, this is the unspoken skeleton of the dances anyway, the meditative, it's just there. (interviews, June 10–11, 2017)

The aim of the three-hour durational piece *Archipelago Archives Exhibit #7: If I Could Set with the Sun*, he writes in the program notes, is to embed the new "composite dance" into milieus of "palace, temple, archeological ruin, closed and open architectures, and water" (mangrove wetlands, monsoons, temple ponds). But it is also, more important, in conversation with different approaches to contemporary dance, responding to evolving present-day physiological appreciations, social conflicts, and composite identities.

1.

Slowly, very slowly, in sinuous slow motion, she lowers herself into a kneeling position. Slowly. No ripple, barely a stir, disturbs the inch of water in which she kneels. Silence. Darkened space with only two small spotlights. Occasionally, soft snatches of music, birdsong, or the muffled gong of the gamelan waft through the tympanum wall. The faint sounds are ambiguous. Are they cues or merely sounds of elsewhere across the archipelago waters? An island shape is blurrily indicated only as a large blob beneath the water's surface. With calm control she sinks backward until on her derriere, arms

and legs opened out, like a water bug on its back. She arches further back. The tension, the strength, is exquisite. It would be so much easier to do these movements more quickly, but she holds her limbs up, nearly motionless, for sustained periods. It is done without strain, face impassively calm.

For a while, this is all I can make out. But then slowly she moves back into a kneeling posture, slowly, slowly raising her hands in namaste above her head like the spire on a stupa. The arms begin to move slowly down along the body and behind her back, ending in a perfect, impossible namaste with her palms together nestled in the curve behind her arched back. The exquisite pose is held for a while. Then the arms slowly come around to her front, palms meeting again in a third namaste, which then opens like a lotus flower. The little finger spreads, the palms point down like the head of a diving swan. One palm draws back, allowing the other hand, beak-like, to lead. The swan slowly descends into the water, palms together again, and, miraculously, curving their way, slip under the water surface without disturbing it. The palms then pull back along the folded right leg on which she is sitting and then forward over the knee. Like a *naga* or crocodile sliding into the water, now with both arms down, she lifts up her derriere in an arch and slowly turns, until she is lying on her side in the water. The left arm, like a swan again, lifts up and bends back, the wrist allowing the hand to bend back further around her head.

As she rises into a kneeling position, the second arm also rises, and together the palms come up into a namaste on top of her head. They slowly pull apart, each forming the shape of a bird. She returns her body into the water, rolling onto her stomach, arms outstretched like bird wings, raising her torso and legs. She returns to her kneeling position and a final namaste. She rises in silence, stands in meditation, and slowly exits from the square water pond, asking no acknowledgment from the few of us sitting on the floor around the walls.

2.

He enters the pond and assumes a standing pose like a life-size temple carving of a dancer. His feet are flat on the ground, his hands in a mudra: index finger touching thumb, arms moving ever so slowly outward, leaning back, twisting his shoulders ever so slowly, eyes closed or mere slits in a dreamlike state. As his powerful muscular body slowly turns, his palms move into mudras of nurturing (pointing toward the earth) and protecting (palm vertical, facing out toward the viewer). Slowly the left arm drops in very slow contin-

uous motion until the hand almost touches the water. He slowly sinks into a squat and from that posture into a kneeling position.

The next afternoon, when I return to catch the end of the performance, he rises from the kneeling position in the water, slowly twisting his body, arms ending in the mudra of index finger to thumb, or pointing with a bent index finger and curved hand, culminating in the namaste. He stands, holding the pose. Finally, as if still in a meditative state, he slowly walks out from the square water pond, leaving wet footprints behind to dry on the cement floor.

3.

Beyond the tympanum wall, on the other side, in an adjoining room, eight fifteen-minute videos of *sound* (natural sound, chant, and song), *images* (from Indonesia, India, and Singapore), and Sanskrit or Tamil *texts* (in English translations/trans-creations) sequentially loop, percussively repeat, vocally resound, and visually reenvision. Each viewing allows the mind to notice new things, new details, associations, insights, memories, and catacoustics. *Eight*: the eight propositions from ancient Persia and *The Pseudo-Aristotelian Politics* (known in Arabic and Latin as *Sirr al-asrar*, *Secretum secretorum*) of political wisdom in the octagonal ring of mutual implication.[8] Eight: the Chinese character for eight can be read *ba,* resonating in sound with *fa*, good fortune, so eight is lucky and can bring luck. Eight: the *ashta nayikas* or eight dance positions, roles, or moods for heroines in Bharatanatyam. Eight: the spokes of the *dharma chakra,* or wheel of life. Eight: the number turned laterally is the sign for infinity. The ringing sound of rain, the evaporation-rain cycle, the seasonal monsoon coming and going, erosion and renewal, the double ring of infinity and the Möbius strip reinforce one another.[9] The lines of the lyric serve to announce the eight videos, soundscapes, and texts:

Time will Tell
Water Song
Held in Place
Third Day of Spring
Lines of Age
Morning Song
Story of Strings

"Memory of Moisture" (line 1): The sound of a single drip accompanies the image of a drop from a cement overhang. Drip. Drip onto dry asphalt.

Crumbling wall. Pan up to a crumbling temple amid palm trees. The dry asphalt is the temple pool when there was water. A text continues:

> I descend into what would have been water, the temple pond.
> the temple pond had gone dry
> for the first time in ten years
> parched the earth, parched the bird, parched her lips,
> her songs turned dry, her life don't fly, and her parchment?
> "I bear a message, for the mother, so bury me in her"

We see a wooden horse, its paint fading, and a headless wooden goat standing and waiting in the temple portico:

> the hind legged horse (dilapidated as he was)
> the hind legged horse, heeds the birds call[s]
> and then he just waits, with all his other mates
> they stare at earth, till the headless-goat, spots a rising hump
> birth of earth, with bird by side, singing swelling chants

I remember the dancer's rise, and the namaste gesture, as the chant swells:

> o, pure instinct, rise,
> o, pure quality, rise,
> o, bestial being, rise,
> o, mountain mother, rise,
> o, barren mother, rise
> o, aged goddess, rise
> o, fish-eyed lady, rise,
> o, seamstress, rise,
> o, nurse of cure tree, rise
> o, queen of time-town, rise
> o, pain pounding power, rise,
> o, angry energy, rise, already

The camera pans across fading temple paintings of multiarmed goddesses and gods, and the chant continues with a driving gamelan percussion: "Om . . . pure instinct, pure bestial being, goddess angry energy. . . . Sounds of rain and anklets, pounding rain, tropical downpour. Om . . . the chant against the pounding beat of the rain:

> and that is how
> and that is how (said the bird)

and that is how, the mother rose
from earth up to sky,
and tore the clouds (with her toenail) (yoe nai)
and tore the clouds until they rained out loud
so wet by rain, everything was once again
reunited with, an image of itself.
Duality was restored,
(don't let anyone tell you otherwise).

The reflection of the temple and sky is mirrored in the rippling pond, inverted so the water is on top, rippling gently, while the scene on land is below. The sound sources are from Surakarta in Indonesia (water dripping) and Chidambaram in India (tropical downpour at the Ugrakall Temple). The image sources are from the Agniswara temple in Thirupugulur, and the procession sculptures from Virateshwara temple in Vazhuvur (India).[10]

"Time will Tell" (line 2): The gong produces a deep reverberating sound. The center of the gong, in close-up, like a beautiful dark nipple on a rust-brown breast, is hit with a mallet wrapped in green cloth in a slow, steady beat, allowing the reverb to die away between beats. A nearby fly, on the skeletal remains of a frog, rubs its legs together (like a human rubbing its hands). The gamelan beats. A cricket orchestra sounds. The gong's nipple reappears. Black ants now swarm over the carcass. Text in the shape of the gong appears on a side screen:

to play the gong
is to play time the sound
that inhabits the space between
strikes is the body of time the strike
itself is a gesture that triggers awareness
of this body that is why my baton is heavily
padded so as to diffuse attention from the strike
so the pattern of striking does not shift so the
your awareness of past (memory) and your
awareness of the future (imagination) may be
enfolded into the rotundity of now that
way time is never tense in linearity
but rippling past and future lie still
in erotic enfolds the present
their forever unborn child

"Water Song" (line 3): The quiet sound of running water is accompanied by the image and colors of a green-and-brown mangrove swamp. A family stands in floodwaters up to their knees. The chant continues interspersed with birdsong:

> *Until boats, the craft of meditation was lost,*
> Lotus continued. You hear her sing. Wake up!
> Vishnu lay looking at Sita with lust.
> Vishnu calls Sita, come lie on my chest.

Sound of the flute, as the camera pans across fading frescoes.

> Don't let anyone tell you otherwise
> mountains of empty touch
> sunken valleys of weight
> rivers of breath,
> weeping winds of gaze,
> no roads to cities of hearts,
> *to sail was the only way,*
> the only way to sail was to sink the body,
> then empty the mind,
> *migration was a meditation*,
> this was so for a long time.

A shadow puppet (*wayang*) stands in the ocean. People stand in floodwaters up to their knees.

> *until boats came along* and *the craft of meditation was forever lost*
> *the lotus* had silently witnessed the sinking of the body,
> and emptying of mind, through the length of time
> if you close your eyes, you can *hear her sing, from under the water*,
> her memory of meditation

"Held in Place," (line 4): A fly close up. Silent and still. It moves only one frame: only a wing moves. Pause. Then a leg moves. Pause. Another wing moves one frame. A text follows: "Anything held in place will become something else. Many years ago we practiced mindful eating, observing our chewing, chewing teeth bang, swirling saliva singing, word whirling melting, alphabet soup thick-brewing blood, draining the mouth, pond, word sink into being, not a word/image in my eye." A songbird in a cage fills the

frame. Batik-shirted musicians can be seen only in snatches as a red cloth in the foreground is put over the gamelan. An older man's face smiles as he helps cover the instrument.

"The fly is like a spring." The fly and the spider, both perfect images of articulating limbs, the inbuilt minimalism of Javanese dance, in contrast to the more staccato stamping of Indian or Balinese dance. Because of the freeze-frames, the fly is not quite as *alus* (slow, refined) as Yogyakarta-style dance. Yogyakarta dance is *alus*, in contrast to the *kesar*, "crude," or *lincah*, "lively," dance of Surakarta (solo). *Crude* means merely following the rhythm, while *alus* is "a physical tension between tension and fluidity, subtlety of being late but not too late in relation to the beat" (Hughes-Freeland 2012, 172). *Alus* is also an oppositional pair to "*gagah* (robust, energetic, strong, muscular, brash) in a continuum of male dances in Yogyakarta where court dances are famous for their fighting forms (both men and women), include dialogue and joking as the dancers make their bets on each fight, evoking the male ethos of the barracks and tournaments" (35).

Alus thus is perhaps the meditative form practiced in the opposite studio by the two dancers, female and male. "In all of these forms," Kirin Kumar says about his dancers, *"every limb, every joint that can be articulated is articulated."* The goal of *alus* dance, says Felicia Hughes-Freeland, "is to keep moving, which cannot be represented as a pose" (108). Poses "held in place" are slowly, slowly, fluidly, moving on. "Anything held in place will become something else."

"Third Day of Spring" (line 5): Close-up of the thin legs of an old village woman. She leans down, her hands rhythmically moving, laying down matrices of white dots in powdered rice flour and sinuous white lines looping around the dots, enclosing them in sine waves or elongated infinity eights. These worshipful morning rituals of auspiciousness placed on washed ground, at the entry of domiciles, are called *kolams* in Tamil. Where rice is used, ants and birds are invited to eat in a gesture of harmony, and the enclosed lines keep out evil. The text comments on the connections of ritual tradition, meanings partially lost, "almost ancient, carrying only memory in its creases": "Rooted to her mother and her motherhood, I don't know if any of this is true, but here goes . . ."

"Lines of Age" (line 6): A spider's web up close against a red cloth background might, at first, be misrecognized as an abstract painting. "Like horn bill, wind, electronic quiet imperceptible lines of age," says the text. The

spider's *eight* legs are splayed out, articulated like the fly, like the dancers, now against a white gauze cloth through which one can faintly see an older woman moving her hands fluidly, weaving and conducting. "These lines are all she leaves." Her hands and the spider's legs produce "that fluidity, just pressure, but good tensile strength, like the web. It has robustness but just enough. It's very limited. Very specific." "No, less, less!" the dance instructor coaches the novice to achieve the inbuilt minimalism or emotional "less" in Javanese dance, the refined *alus*.

"Morning Song" (line 7): Snail's head up close, antennae moving, seeking. Cricket sounds. The snail lives in Singapore at Toa Payoh Block 193. A text is on the side screen, translated from the Sanskrit, and also recited in its mesmerizing original language:

> morning mindful heart holds stuff of soul
> being (real + mindful + content) (like) great-swan-being
> not a(sleep + wake + dream) yet a(ware) al(ways)
> that being = undivided, (is not) this being = subdivided (into five:
> *earth-water-air-fire-ether*)
>
> morning, savor something, beyond image + word
> all, sound shines, sonic grace
> even saying, (not this) (not this), makes for negative knowing
> that being, (as yet) unborn, (and yet) undying
> from here world entirely still
> (being) so still, snake seems, (like) string
> morning mindful, heart holds, stuff of soul
> being (real + mindful + content) (like) great-swan-being
> not a(sleep + wake + dream) yet a(ware) al(ways)
> that being = undivided, (is not) this being = subdivided (into five:
> *earth-water-air-fire-ether*)
>
> morning, savor something, beyond image + word
> all, sound shines, sonic grace
> even saying, (not this) (not this), makes for negative knowing
> that being, (as yet) unborn, (and yet) undying
>
> morning, opening, low light shade
> entire eternal, word, being said
> from here, world entirely still
> (being) so still, snake seems, (like) string

"Story of Strings" (line 8): To the sound of the flute, the camera pans across wonderful old decaying frescoes, as the text recounts:

> Vishnu lay languorously leaning liberally on Ananta
> Vishnu lay languorously looking lustfully at Shiva
> Visnu grew heavy, Gravity
> Ananta grew uncomfortable, Asphyxia
> Vishnu awoke, Levity
> Ananta gasped: what was that?
> Vishnu: Shiva my dream. He danced upon my chest. He moves me so.
> Ananta: (and you move me) I too want to move (you) the way he did
> Vishnu: I feel your un(=an)ending = anata) desire
> Vishnu: Dance you shall learn from Shiva none-the-less
> Hearing this Ananta's desire swells beyond measure

4.

Discussions by dancers, performance artists, and performance studies practitioners about the evolution of contemporary dance in India since Chandralekha, who died in 2006, may be helpful in comparison with Kirin Kumar's own development and practice, as a way to further explore how traditions can trigger new perspectives and how experimentation generates examination of the ways the world today no longer operates in the codes and hierarchies of the past century.

For Kumar, who was born in Bangalore but from the age of fifteen spent his next twenty years in Singapore, where he went to school, dancing has been a seeking process, not unlike that described by Chandralekha, Padmini Chettur, and their colleagues in Indian contemporary dance. Kumar came to dance very late, after he studied engineering at the National University of Singapore. He did a little Odissi with Rakka Maitra when she first came to Singapore and was looking for students in 2007 (she now runs her own company, Chowk, in the Emily Hill arts center). He says he "started Bharatanatyam once or twice, but quit it because I felt it impossible to coordinate arm and leg. I was coming from engineering with no dance training whatsoever, at twenty-two I started" (interviews, June 9–10, 2017). He also tried "what they call contemporary dance, but the unsaid prefix is Euro-American contemporary, techniques coming from a certain period of modernity between North America and Europe, and that is the basis of modern, of

contemporary dance here [in Singapore]." So he went to Hong Kong to train at an arts school and then moved to Berlin to study dance, where there was a program that allowed him to focus on his own "thematic physical practice."

Padmini Chettur, born in 1970, a decade and a half earlier, coming from a secular family and disadvantaged by being raised speaking English, provides a somewhat parallel account of searching for a "thematic physical practice" in which she could feel creative and committed.[11] She, too, came to identify with dance after studying a secular subject in college: chemistry. Unlike Kumar, she had danced from childhood to college, but only going through the motions of proficiency and not dancing during the four years of college. Having found Chandralekha to be a quite different kind of dance teacher ("wipe off that silly smile!"), she describes how she tried to unlearn lessons from classical Indian dance, retaining some valuable features and through experimentation finding new performance modalities. She, too, traveled to Europe (albeit as an already proficient dancer) in 1993–2000, watching, joining the odd workshop, and experimenting with a fellow dancer who along with her had worked under Chandralekha. Chandralekha's point of departure, Chettur writes, was always searching for the flow, identifying the journey from one position to another. Flow meant "slowness, even stillness, activating the spine as a tool to enable flow" (Chettur 2017). In a gesture toward the sociopolitical, Chettur notes that "the spine is the first to be affected by social habits and brutalities of life," a striking formulation not unlike the intestines in the work of Entang Wiharso (chapter 3), as well as a general pointer to dance used for political awareness raising or commentary, such as that of Ahmedabad-based Mallika Sarabhai.[12]

While performing Chandralekha's *Sharira* in 1993, Chettur writes, "I felt dance in my fingertips, in the tips of my toes, base of my spine literally as the pulsating force" (Chettur 2017) and sketches out some important contrasts in the way movement and posture are conceived and enacted:

> Classical dancers hold tension in their fingers. Letting go of this led us to explore the connection of arm and torso. Several of those "habits" had to do with holding excessive but unnecessary tension within the body. It took years of work to arrive at a greater level of efficiency, understanding of being in parallel with the leg, a position in which the leg attaches to the hip in a way that is neither turned out nor in. This is a way of working with the legs in which the center and spine can be thought about very differently from the more open position of the Bharatanatyam *araimandi* (half-sitting posture). My arm began to find its line, and gestures found

their way back into my hands. I also began to think about the relationship between the head, an extremity of the body, and the tailbone.

She describes her own early performance piece, *Fragility*, as very different from the way classical dancers are taught to be strong and beautiful, instead placing the body in a vulnerable position. She describes the trademark of her later work as "the obsession with line, the tension growing out of a spiral, the preoccupation with center, the detailing of feet in the ground" (Chettur 2017). I think here of Matthew Goh in the *Archipelago Archives* performance piece, using the tension growing out of a spiral as he, almost stock-still, slowly twists and fluidly moves from one posture to another, always on the move but with almost imperceptible slowness, postures that do not look easy but show no strain, the tension strong but smooth like a spider's silk (figure 6.1).

Chettur's description of her initiation in Bharatanatyam as a seven-year-old in 1977 provides a striking counterpoint to as well as a platform for her later experiments. The first year, she amusingly recalls with a sense of frustration and impatience, was only learning *adavus* (steps), without using her arms, in three speeds, mostly through observing by watching the older girls in the front rows.[13] "The only corrections were 'sit lower in the *araimandi* [half-sitting posture],' or 'stamp harder' [the problem of releasing one leg at a time out of, or into, stable symmetric position]" (Chettur 2016). Nonetheless, she says she learned a sense of geometry, the aesthetic of the grounded body, and ways to arrange the moving body in many different rhythm patterns, with perfect precision. The second year, she was allowed to use her arms (developing a sense of planes in space) and play with countersymmetry, providing an awareness of center and spine. But the limitation was that "one was never really taught how to hold one's arms in the back, how to relax the tops of shoulders, how to widen the space between shoulder blades to extend the arm-line without tiring the neck and shoulder muscles" (Chettur 2016). This would lead her eventually to study anatomy. The third limitation, which caused her to leave dance at age seventeen, choosing instead to study chemistry in college, was the "meaningless smiling, the performativeness," a quite different philosophy of expression from what she would begin to learn from Chandralekha in the 1990s, with whom she worked for ten years, after which she developed herself further.

In 2005, on commission for the Seoul Performing Arts Festival, Chettur developed her performance piece *Pushed* with her sound collaborator (and

6.1 Mathew Goh performs in Kiran Kumar's *Archipelago Archives Exhibit #7* [alternatively *Exhibit #3*]*: If I Could Set with the Sun*. RAW Moves Dance Company (Goodman Arts Centre, Singapore), publicity poster, 2017.

husband), Maarten Visser, and with Korean traditional musicians. In this transcultural work, a different kind of "archipelago" of the mind, Visser and she learned to negotiate among the seven emotional states (anger, pain, pleasure, happiness, sorrow, love, and lust) with which Korean music works and the nine *rasas* (*navarasa*) or emotions with which Indian tradition works (love/beauty, laughter, sorrow, anger, heroism/courage, terror/fear, disgust, surprise/wonder, and peace/tranquility).[14] The multimedia work with lighting and costume designer Zuleikha Chaudhari provided graded colors and hues throughout the work, so that, as Chettur notes as an example, "when a body releases itself from the 'caterpillar' phrase mid-stage, the

dancer repeatedly hauls her spine upright by pulling her hair while the entire stage turns into a sea of red" (Chettur 2017).

It was Chettur's teacher Chandralekha whose 1995 premiere of *Mahakal* stunned Indian audiences with its subversion of classical performance styles and its eroticism. Seven female and two male movement artists danced the serpent of infinite time, *maha* (great) *kaal* (time, time of death). Mahakal is a name of Shiva the destroyer of all, beyond which there is nothing. Chandralekha, a generation older than Chettur (her first performance piece was in 1961), had trained in Bharatanatyam, but in *Mahakal*, instead of the opening invocation (*pushpanjali*), the stage opened gradually under feeble lights, displaying unadorned, vanquished bodies, "devoid of erect spines, with turned out legs and fingers curling" (Chettur 2017), writhing on the floor moving with prolonged slowness. A female voice sings the *Natanam Aadinar* invoking Shiva as Nataraja, the lord of ecstatic dance, the master of both the gentle *lasya* form of dance with which he creates the world and the violent *tandava* dance with which he destroys it. Creation and destruction are two sides of the cycle, of Shiva's nature, destruction in order to allow new creation, which in turn is destroyed to begin anew. A female dancer in a white sari steps over the bodies on the floor and channels the male dancer's many poses and variations. Then two dancers come close together in *mei-adavus* (swaying torso and hips), miming sensual intercourse. The entire piece is constructed of a "bank" of a hundred movements and postural ideas, working laterally across the stage, broken only by the representation of lust as the snake exploring the push and pull of spinal curves, using the idea of an impulse that travels through the body and can be transmitted from one body to another, and tension to make the body dynamic even during the smallest shifts or movements.

There are some more parallels and differences with Kirin Kumar's explorations. Kumar and anthropologist Saskia Kersenboom look to remnant practices in Shiva temples in the Kaveri valley, prodding reluctant Shaivite priests who have enshrined only the *lingam* in the sanctum sanctorum of the temples to reveal where they have removed the *yoni* (the female complement, the *shakhti* with whom Shiva interacts). It is always there but often hidden in the back, under rags, pushed aside. What is lost in much classical dance, Kumar and Kersenboom speculate, is the tantric understanding of the metaphorical power of erotic shamanism or tantrism, and the yogic power of the two combined. It is as if half the semiotics of the metaphorical

play of creativity is repressed, awaiting its recovery by contemporary performance practitioners, not for literal archaeological or historical purposes, but for a renewed aesthetic recognition of the relations of the body and the world. Might, Kumar's practice suggests, *lasya-tandava* resonate with Javanese *alus-gagah*, or, rather, what can each learn from the other?

This is also similar to the way in which Chandralekha explored yoga and Kalaripayattu (the Kerala martial art), not in order to fuse these with Bharatanatyam but to see how their techniques could inform a better understanding of what Chettur calls the body's "physicality," and, more generally, of the question, "Where does the body begin and where does it end" beyond itself?

> She [Chandralekha] saw the body as a very primal and central character or vehicle for larger questions about life. . . . She felt that as a society we were perhaps all the time just caught up in the mundane and it was affecting bodies in certain ways. Everything was about speed and information, and capitalism . . . these things that already started in the 1980s and 1990s. . . . For her the body was not to be trivialized. . . . [T]his question of hers came from her own certain kinds of political investigations, but what was interesting for me was how this question translates into her work as performance. (Chettur 2017)

Again, I cannot help but think here of Entang Wiharso's work (chapter 3) on speed, information, the spine, or, in his case, the intestines. Both he and Zai Kuning (chapter 5) also at times deploy ritual and performance as both abstraction and transformative process. Chettur continues:

> I think that question [where does the body end and where does it begin] itself led her to create her entire theory about body and space . . . that the arm [*she sits up erect in dancer position, swings her left arm away from her chest*] was never just reaching from the center of the spine to the tips of the fingers, it had to reach into eternity. So there was an extension of the body which actually became a tangible, technical thing, that when you work with Chandra as a dancer, this is what you had to learn, you had to create the endlessness out of your own body line. (Chettur 2017)

And you had to learn how to "charge space."

In Kalaripayattu, Chandralekha found grounded bodies with a strength that she thought Bharatanatyam did not have, and in yoga, she found a profound understanding of the spine and flow of energy. With these she tried to

create a vocabulary in which "movement is the primary unit" and "movement makes its own meaning," favorite slogans of Chandralekha. Chettur elaborates, "Movement has its own existence separate even from the interpretation that a performer gives it, and it is there that the meaning must be read, where the *visual* sense of movement *takes the audience*" (Chettur 2017).

In Chandralekha's last and greatest piece of choreography, *Sharira: Fire/Desire*, which Padmini Chettur has performed, there is an extraordinary slow moving of the body into a complex geometric shape, unlike anything in Bharatanatyam. In my first astonished viewing of Tishani Doshi performing the piece, it looked like a cricket with many limbs held to the sides in angles of readiness (see Chandralekha 2016). In later viewings I suspected it was instead the female of the pair of *karuncha* birds that the Sage Valmiki saw embracing as an arrow shot one down, and he saw the pain of the other. But as Chandralekha says in a video interview, "As it [the choreography] developed what one saw was a very beautiful erasure of the story itself, and slowly the whole thing went into the background and it almost became its opposite, seeking of togetherness rather than separation" (Chandralekha 2014). And, as if answering Kumarasamy's question in Singapore, she says, "The performance, the statement, must come from visual work and not from ideas," or again: "The idea goes away very fast and what remains is actually what I'm doing with the dancers."

That first image, perhaps best first viewed in the clip displayed in the video interview, is of a beautiful woman on her stomach, head held high, soles of her feet high above her head facing forward in the elbows of her arms, which, slightly bent, are outstretched with the palms open and facing forward. Her hands rise up, and her fingers spread (figure 6.2). In the full version, we see her moving slowly into this position with beautiful shadow work on the back of the stage, amid street sounds, gradually drowned out by the drone of the *tampura* (long-necked string instrument), the *pakhawaj* (double-headed drum), and *Drupad* (male vocals). Chandralekha comments, "My concern is about the body, dance just happens . . . the body and its enigmatic nature, its secrets, there is no end to it. So my question is not about dance, but when I think of the body there are hundreds of things simultaneously comes cascading down my head, the geometry of the body, its fantastic geometry, the triangle, the erotic kind of body, sensuality in the body, sexuality in the body, spirituality in the body, how does one understand all these live together in our body" (Chandralekha 2014). Her quest, Chandralekha says in the video interview, is a woman's struggle for recov-

ery, a conscious return to the body, how to maximize energy, how to resist as a woman in a patriarchal society, a search for what is my space, what is my spine. The video in part is an interactive talk with an audience, and in response to a question about anger, she says, "Not anger as much as indignation . . . you must internalize [indignation], it must come into your bodies, it must come into your spine. Without indignation it would be impossible, there is too much [in the world] which is wrong" (Chandralekha 2014). *Sharira* is about desire and passion but also renewal (there are birthing scenes) and birds mating, male and female. As she repeats, "In the body there is no difference between sensuality, sexuality, spirituality; the three are amalgam, we need all that . . . to harmonize ourselves, and not to become dry and not to make compartments in ourselves. I feel the feminine principal is primal" (Chandralekha 2014).

6.2 Tishani Doshi performs in Chandralekha's *Sharira*. Video by Olivier Barot. Screenshot: M. Fischer (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OXCc10lBkIw).

The relation among body, emotion, and the worlds of daily suffering is signaled by the line "the spine is the first to be affected by social habits and brutalities of life" (Chettur 2017, partly quoting Chandralekha). This is an opening to the sociopolitical commentary of some recent dance. Chettur says her 2005 performance piece *Paper Doll* is about the tenuous links connecting people in society. Five bodies dance in solos, duets, trios, quartets, and quintets. Like the "bank of a hundred movements and postural ideas of movements" that Chandralekha invoked in describing her *Mahakal*, so, too, Chettur creates a new process of movement unit creation for *Paper Doll*. Wanting dancers to have more ownership in the creation process, she ran workshops for a year in which she instructed one group of dancers to give her eight simple actions of the feet; another group, eight simple actions with the head and shoulder; and a third group, eight simple actions with the spine. Like a children's puzzle of moving pieces around, she then collected the actions in random sequences, so "you are actually creating a set of strange actions that isn't controlled by intention . . . that all had the same strange connectivity of body parts" (Chettur 2017). From eight initial movements, they built forty phrases. They played with the phrases through elongation or shortening of their qualities. They showed how a single body can counter the energy of four other bodies, how the quality of weight can be worked into phrases of giving and taking, and how a single part of the body could be made heavy. More tightly structured than contact improvisation, it works out all the permutations of possibilities, durationally and rhythmically. The final image in *Paper Doll*, she writes, is "*Krishna devanandan* (Krishna devotee) being assisted to her feet to join the group, after her last solo finished on the floor, [which] makes an almost animalistic reference to images of herds and stray individuals, isolation and empathy."

In her 2013 three-hour performance piece, *Beyond the Proscenium — Wall Dancing*, commissioned by the site-specific visual arts curators at the Clark House Initiative in Mumbai, the bodies of the dancers lean against the walls or each other, peeling off into new positions, energies always unaggressive and unassertive, highlighting dependence on supporting places and people. Even before this, she says she had started to frame her work as visual art rather than performance art:

> There was often no narrative, it was very abstract, it has a sculptural sense to it. . . . So when I started to engage the visual arts space, I found it quite freeing. There was a sense that the work could remain quite raw,

there wasn't this whole drama production. . . . Every time I performed *Beautiful Thing 2* off the proscenium in a simple setting with just some tube lights or gallery lights with nothing around, with people just sitting around me, I started to really enjoy it as an experience and so I thought with *Wall Dancing* . . . why not start by actually creating a work for a non-stage situation. (Chettur 2017)

Furthermore, she thought, since people were always saying her work was slow, boring, and hard to sit through for an hour, why not create a much longer piece with the expectation that people could come and go as they do at a painting exhibition? It would give her the freedom to create and structure a much longer work, and the audience would not have to be bored. "So, it felt like a happy balance. I could create a three hour, endless, slow and boring work, but the audience could choose. Ironically what ended up happening was audiences were always coming at the beginning and sitting for three hours" (Chettur 2017). But this was no ordinary art venue show. The Clark House Initiative sited the performance within the last cotton cloth mill in the Girangaon (literally, "mill village") former industrial district of central Bombay, once home to 130 mills. As the curators put it, "Juxtaposing her project against the mechanical movement of the machines, as the displacements of dance, became the metaphors for the gentrification of the district that is replacing the mills and the housing colonies" (Haines 2016).

Other modern dancers, like Jayachandran Palazhy and Surjit Nongmeikapam, make the social commentary of "the spine is the first to be affected by social habits and brutalities of life" more explicit. Nongmeikapam's *Nerves* portrays the indigenous people of Manipur living amid armed violence: "Three bare bodied Manipuri men, clad in loin cloths, face the audience, kneel down with hands folded behind their heads in a position of surrender. Army boots attached to strings drop down from the ceiling. The dancers rise to their feet. Each clutches a boot pushing it tightly against his face, then thrusts it away, so it swings back and forth precariously missing the dancers who jerk their heads to save themselves. As the assaulting boots gather velocity, dancers lurch and bend with greater vigor and exhaustion" (Singh 2016). In Palazhy's *Chronotopia*, inspired in part by the Tamil epic, *Silappadikaram*, but also working with digital media (Salter 2009), three women dance different facets of one character whose memories in the past, present, and future (three spaces onstage) are wiped clean by wars, conflicts, and consumerism. The dancers evoke well-known events and chose

gestures that precipitate memories. Through this technique they intend to model and build up collective memory. Like Chettur, Palazhy has been working interculturally, in his case with Japanese composer and video artist Mitsuaki Matsumata and designer and architect Naoki Hamanaka. Like Kirin Kumar, Palazhy is invested in reclaiming traditional physical wisdom, in his case grounded in the dance and martial arts traditions of Kerala. He, too, has become an international artist, having lived in London for fifteen years, training at the London Contemporary Dance School; studying classical ballet, tai chi, capoeira, and African dance; and establishing the Imlata Dance Company. He works collaboratively with interactive technology and telematics. At Arizona State University, he worked on "The Role of Interactive Technology and Telematics in Performance," a project title he continued to use through 2019 (Palazhy 2019); and at the Attakkalari Centre for Movement Arts in Bangalore (of which he is the founder and artistic director since 1992), he has been engaged in a Ford Foundation–supported digital documentation project on the "movement principles of Indian physical traditions." The Attakkalari Centre's slogan is "Traditional Physical Wisdom, Innovation and Technology," and it has produced a series of multimedia dance productions that have toured internationally (Palazhy 1992–; Nath 2020).

CONCLUSIONS

I want to end with returns to two items referred to above: for aesthetic reasons to Edith Podesta's *Indices of Vanishment,* staged by RAW Moves (at its home in the Aliwal Arts Centre, Singapore) a week or two before Kiran Kumar's work; and for two methodological reasons—the historical evolution of dance, and analytic tensions among the layering of the communication strata mobilized in dance—to the conversations on generational changes in Indian dance that Aravinth Kumarasamy hosted and moderated at the Singapore Esplanade Rehearsal Theater on June 5, 2013, with leaders of the Indian Bharatanatyam, Odissi, and Katak dance worlds, inviting members of both the older generation (born in the 1950s and 1960s) and the younger generation (born in the 1980s). Unlike individual interviews or autobiographical accounts, this was an opportunity to see the differences and fault lines among approaches, expressed in friendly but subtlety argumentative dialogue, and not so much as history or lineages but more as approaches to audiences today.

Aesthetically, Podesta's *Indices of Vanishment* returns us to the calligraphic or ink line-drawing minimalism and conceptual vigor of the scene in Tan Pin Pin's film *Singapore GaGa* (2005), in which Margaret Leng Tan, in black, bows and folds herself in one smooth motion to sit erect, with arms and legs at stiff forty-five-degree angles at a toy piano to play John Cage's *4'33"* in the void deck of an HDB complex; and to Kiran Kumar's *Archipelago Archives* with its paired performances of Jeryl Lee's slow movement into and out of a namaste behind her back, and Matthew Goh's slow, smooth, and continuous rotation through the Shiva dance poses (*karana*) you might see on temple walls. The premise of, or connective narrative for, Podesta's piece, given in her program notes, is of a couple about to move out of their HDB flat before it is demolished, all packed except a few pieces of furniture, with the "emotional clutter" of their lives symbolized by tiny arrows they have been hoarding. In a promotional video playing outside the theater as one enters, as well as a trailer online, the choreographer invokes the memory of her godfather, who was such a hoarder that when he died, it proved nigh impossible to get into his apartment, itself posing a situation of danger. Hoarding can be of physical objects but also emotional ones.

The husband is seated at a long table reading a book, while the wife, in a huge stuffed tent dress (carrying baggage), is sweeping up with a tiny brush and dustpan and wiping off the table. From the speakers, male voices read nostalgic love poetry about love long gone, either the partner gone, or the passion, or merely that it comes and goes but is never far from one's being, part of oneself. The locations are New Orleans, New England, and elsewhere; the poems are from Robert Frost, Dylan Thomas, and perhaps Ted Hughes. They begin softly, slowly becoming more audible. The room darkens, and a window opens, revealing a young woman sitting on the sill. She slowly slithers, ever so slowly, down onto the floor. Danced by the extraordinarily lithe and expressive Melyn Chow, she becomes an angel of death or vengeance, or Diana shooting arrows of pain into the couple, also a seductress, by turns sultry, aggressive, and manipulative. The wife, danced by Jeryl Lee, eventually with her bulky middle-aged dress and emotional protective paddings removed by the temptress, is equally lithe. She has a mobile face that slides into vivid modes of fear, anger, defeat, and revenge. The movements of the two women and the man—mirrored and dialogic movements, whether sexual or antagonistic—are beautiful to watch. The arrows, broken by the seductress at the beginning, are shot from a bow or used as daggers to stab each of the couple in turn, putting them into vibrating physical agony. The seduc-

tress becomes increasingly the third woman, distracting the man, pushing him, throwing him around, as the two women struggle over him. He finally decides to remain attached to his wife despite all the seductress's wiles. The final scene, after a brief blackout, is the man on the floor sweeping up dust into the dustpan while also reading from his book, while the woman polishes a cup she takes from an open cardboard box. The man gets up to throw the dust out, returns, and notices her looking from her chair at what he is reading; he offers the open book to her, she takes it from him, and he stands back and in sign language mimes one of the poems from the beginning, now again coming through the speakers, about their being bound together, she being the beauty in his heart.

It is not the story but the motions of the bodies that rivet the attention, and not just their beauty, strength, and litheness but rather the economy and legibility of the actions (*karana*), as if one were reading a line of music or watching a calligraphic form unfold. It is an aesthetic that Chandralekha, Chettur, and Kumar strive for as well, as well as others who stress the concept or philosophy within the dance, or reworked parables for activist "penetration of barriers of prejudice" (Sarabhai 2009). Indeed, Chandralekha and Chettur both speak of *slowly erasing the narrative* until movement becomes its own meaning. It is a process of abstraction but one that remains layered in the body, sculpturally and visually, in a language beyond the linguistic. It becomes for them both a philosophical visual art, not just entertainment or show, as it too often has become. For Mallika Sarabhai, it makes its way to the heart of otherwise-blinkered members of an audience secure in their unexamined understandings.

Methodologically, the June 5, 2013, discussion moderated by Kumarasamy focused on analytic tensions among the several ramifying *layers* of the communication strata mobilized in dance. *Layers*, a term repeatedly used by Chandralekha and Chettur, traditionally could refer to the analytics already present in the Sanskrit *Natyashastra*—*nritta* (drama), *nritya* (mime to music and song), *natya* (pure dance and sculptural poses); or modes of expression: *angika* (use of body and limbs), *vachika* (use of song and speech), *aharya* (costuming), and *satvika* (psychological states); or also to the different rhythms and instruments of the different forms; and to *abhinaya* as the art of leading an audience toward the experience (*bhava*) of a sentiment (*rasa*). These are helpful particularly in following the terminology that dancers internalize through their training, and they can be a touchstone to reinvention of "the total theatre that is spoken about in our *shastras*" before

the "walls that developed over the centuries within various artistic forms, which kept dancing divorced from theatre, from music, and from storytelling" (Sarabhai 2014). Sarabhai notes that from her first piece, *Shakti: The Power of Women* (1990), she broke through these walls, using different styles of dancing, song, masks, stories, comedy, and so on, driven by her concerns with violence against women, patriarchy, human rights, and inequality. She follows in the footsteps of her mother and of Rabindranath Tagore, whose innovative dance-drama *Chandalika* (Tagore 1945) used the figure of a Chandal (untouchable) girl who breaks taboos, expectations, and social norms by giving water to (falling in love with) a monk (Ananda, the Buddha's disciple), a powerful intervention at the time for women's rights.

But perhaps an even more helpful analytic approach is to attend to conflicts among the layers, as dancers talk about them. Among these, mostly already indicated above, are the following:

1 *Centrality or starting point or leadership of* music versus concept, script, story, and movement chant (e.g., Chettur: "most of my work is created without music"; Priyadarsin Govind: "good music is the essence of dance").

2 Classicism versus narrative or other new forms (Leela Samson and Priyadarsin Govind: classicism is fundamental; Mallika Sarabhai: breaking through the walls of separation among the arts).

3 Fusion with other dance forms versus juxtaposition (Prashant Shah).

4 *Collaboration frictions* (dancers versus musicians, older or younger, lead and response); divas versus groups, solo pieces versus troupes, double soloists; *guru-shisya* system as support versus holding back independence and free experiment; age and experience differences.

5 *Frictions between* cultural past and present *social norms*; different *styles of masculinities* in Javanese and Indian dance (Kumar) or tropes of *female social possibilities* (Tagore, Chandralekha, Chettur, Sarabhai).

6 Slippages in the play of *eroticism* among sensuality, sexuality, and spirituality (Chandralekha's *Mahakal* and *Sharira*).

7 The body as a fundamental axis (metaphors of the *spine* [Chandralekha] or *heart* [Sarabhai]), for orientation an extension in the

world ("where does the body end and where does it begin") and for breaking down walls of prejudice, fear, animosity, or emotional baggage (Podesta).

8 The *visual* versus the *narrative*, meaning making in (pure) movement, the notion of the *slow erasure of narrative* through movement, location amid the visual rather than performance arts, or movement juxtaposed to the visual and the chant (Kumar).

9 Abstraction modalities: *combinatories of movement units* (using randomization, vocabulary banks, variable duration and rhythm).

10 *Charging space*, breath traveling across the auditorium, working on a proscenium versus in an informal circle within the audience.

11 *Coordinating with new media* (telematics, film).

As Kumarasamy introduced the discussion, it was about being able "to connect the new generation of dance audiences through productions from conception to music, composition, choreography, costume design, and all the various aspects that are put together in this art form and [how] they transform classical dance in the twenty-first century."

Although more people participated from the floor, on the podium were Leela Samson (b. 1951), the director of Kalakshetra from 2005 to 2012; Priyadarsin Govind (b. 1965), who succeeded as director of Kalakshetra in 2013 and was the first director who had not been a student or teacher of the school, and who practices a style of Bharatanatyam different from that identified with the school and its founder (Rukmini Devi Arundale); Prashant Shah (b. 1965), a noted Katak dancer now based in New York; and Mythili Prakash (b. 1982), a leading figure of new so-called narrative-led dance, based in California.[15]

Music, the first topic, already divides into the composition itself and the musicians, singers, and rhythmists: "This relationship with the musicians has always been sensitive, dicey, antagonistic, difficult to handle," Govind noted in the first round of discussion. For her, good music is "the essence of good dance," allowing the dancer to respond to it, and the music must be true to itself, to the spirit of the raga—that is, the composition, too, has its integrity that must be respected. The roles of the violinist and of the singer are vital, but she noted, "A young dancer cannot risk a young musician, you have to have a seasoned musician, you have to have that support, and

that is why gurus were so important, but that stage is now gone, the gurus would control, now we are making our own pieces, we are on the throne." The singer should enhance the mood for the dancer and "not project himself or herself and their knowledge of music or ability to sing so fast," and, similarly, particularly young accomplished violinists who "suddenly walk in with a slight swagger with their violin and think they can do anything they want with it." Musicians should deliver the *shankara* (luck-making) needed for the mood or nuance the dancer wants. She later noted the disdain that many musicians have for dancers, because they feel the dancers don't really understand music. In return, in the 1960s, when dancers became stars, they sometimes did not respect the musicians.

Still, both Priyadarsin Govind and Leela Samson agreed that "classicism is the bottom line" and that it takes so much training in each form to be proficient enough to play with it in new ways, that even crossing over between forms like Bharatanatyam and Odissi threatens one's control in either because they adhere to different rhythms and footwork, different rhythmic soundscapes. They sometimes bit their tongues: "We have so many Bharatanatyam composers just waiting for us to take them up, I don't think there is any need for us to go into, it doesn't mean by doing that, you are going to, or you are staying in some period of time, it could be very modern expressions, but it is just that they are solid in terms of their musical content, so you can't go wrong with them, that's what I am saying."

Prashant Shah took a middle position, recalling that earlier in his career, he had turned down an important offer in Europe to dance flamenco because he felt he was not yet fully in control of his own form but that a number of years later, he felt secure enough in his own form to be able to collaborate with Kadir Amigo Memis, the Turkish-born founder of the Flying Steps, bringing together hip-hop, breakdance, and African forms of dance.

It was left to Mythili Prakash to articulate the rationale for what was called in the discussion a more "narrative-arc based" approach, as a way in for audiences who aren't familiar with the dance tradition. But she immediately modified this as *multiple layers*: the *aesthetic*, which hits you first; underneath that, the *symbolic,* which gives it depth, so that it is not just "what you see is what you get" but many underlying meanings; and, ultimately, the *yogic*, the experience of being present in the moment, creating what you are creating in the moment. She illustrated with four of her dances, all of which have been performed in Singapore, noting the polar contrast between

the starting points of the first two: *Stree Katha* (2005), *Chandalika* (2011), *Jwala: Rising Flame* (2017), and *Mara* (2018). *Stree Katha* (The woman's story), while based on three heroines from the *Ramayana*—Keikeyi, Shurpanaka, and Sita—began by her writing a script from scratch with no preexisting lyrics or music, starting with an idea of what she wanted to convey.[16] In contrast, with *Chandalika*, she was given both script and music.[17] So it was rather a matter of researching Tagore's intention in writing it, internalizing the music and making supplemental music that would make it conducive to Bharatanatyam, seeing how his words could become meaningful to her, and seeing if the interpretation she was making corresponded with his intentions in his other works. *Jwala: Rising Flame* takes a step further along the continuum of abstraction, a brilliant enactment of the image of fire and how it moves, in four parts, beginning with proud poses of Surya, the sun, as a chariot driver across the sky; followed by a tour de force flickering of hands about one another, gradually expanding into a blaze of swirling hands and exploding into her entire body spinning, filling the stage; followed by sections on energy and becoming (set to a Sufi poem in which the dancing becomes increasingly fluid, expanding into infinity).

Jwala: Rising Flame takes on added layered meaning when one learns that it was created at the passing of her father and the birth of her daughter, the flickering hands perhaps those of a candle both of memorial and then of the explosion into new life of the daughter. *Mara* (*Mara's Secret* and then *Mara: The Mastermind*), in turn, takes another inventive step toward abstract drama, created at the time when she says she had turned toward deeper meditation practices. Mara is the underworld demon and the demon who attempted to distract Buddha. Mara is always trying to distract us with trivial pleasures away from the pursuit of inner freedom. It is danced with a mirrored set of dancers clad in black with inventive face paint and designed for a large stage, in this case the 1,200-seat Hollywood auditorium that had never programmed such a classical Indian dance. In a way, it brings us full circle to the kind of big-stage performances that Kumarasamy himself produces for Singapore and tours to India and elsewhere, and in a way was a fitting conclusion to his hosting of a discussion on different modes of Bharatanatyam dancing that could appeal to a new generation of audiences.

The journey that I began with Kiran Kumar has traced back not just to Java and South India, Berlin (his studio), and California (*Imaginative Ethnographies*) but through strata of changing affordances of movement and dance as material platforms for experimental passages between physical movement and conceptual or philosophical thought—or as Mythili Prakash suggests in *Mara*, between body and mind, between physical capacities and the mazes of the mind's illusions, projections, and diversions.

Epilogue

Probing Arts and Emerging Forms of Life

Spamsoc—[the language of pirated DVD covers, consisting of derivative translations of synopses, credits, legal disclaimers, and special features lists]—travels on the back of intercepted images and speaks of the struggles around them. . . . It is a language from the future that we unfortunately do not yet fully understand, but which already contains very important messages about contemporary social tensions. Translating the language of things is . . . about presencing precarious and risky articulations . . . of objects and their relations that still could become models for future types of connections. — HITO STEYERL, *JENSEITS DER REPRÄSENTATION*

Art is interrogative. Common sense is presuppositional and discursive. Anthropology is to art as ethnography is to common sense, not that ethnography is presuppositional (to the contrary). But the one (anthropology, art) looks for new connections in the discursive other (ethnography, common sense). "Creatives," those who fashion commercial advertisements, mine the presuppositions of common sense and are rewarded when they hear their jingles picked up by ordinary people in a catacoustic mode without necessarily knowing where they originate, a kind of recirculation of what passes for common sense, albeit not necessarily good "taste," passing from linguistic phrase in common use to rhyme or visual pun in creatives' hands and back again to the auditory stream whence it came. Spamsoc is a derivative, debased in one sense but pointing ahead to new poetic licenses,

unprotected and uncredited creative commons. Histories, too, are like Spamsoc, sometimes stuck in an archaic defense of bygone political imperatives or interests, sometimes requiring a kaleidoscopic shaking so that other actors, perspectives, and interests can have their say, as well as the forging of new horizons of common sense.

WE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN MODERN; ENCHANTMENT IS WHERE YOU MAKE IT

> You know why I'm teaching you this song? Well. Long time ago [begins to chant so softly you have to listen closely]. . . . And so you learn a whole series of chants, and sometimes if you are a good enough student, then they'll turn you into what they call a medicine man, but *actually they are called historians*, and they render this long story of how we became human beings, . . . for healing purposes, so they were *actually psychologists*, it is like psychologists work today to remind you, how you are as a human, you know, [continues to chant softly] *na mo ha no ho teh de be te ke na*. . . . [W]hen you lose your way as a native person, you go back home and you find a historian and they remind you of all the suffering and travail we've gone through to be where we are today.
>
> R. CARLOS NAKAI, "HOMEGROWN NOONTIME CONCERT" SERIES, LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, OCTOBER 21, 2011

R. Carlos Nakai introduces himself as a Yute, Southern Athabascan, Shiwi, or Zuni and also a northern Spaniard Celt. A virtuoso Native American flute player, former US military band trumpet player, and classically trained musician who has devised his own notation system for Native American flute playing, he delightfully both is an indigenous advocate and freely acknowledges the mixtures of cultural influences in the formation of indigenous peoples throughout free and forced migratory histories, before and after the formation of the United States. He even acknowledges those of us born in the United States, of whatever origin, as natives of this land who should learn what the land has always had to offer. This is more than a limpid liberal notion of hybridization or assertion that we "have never been modern," always hybrid, and failing at attempts to purify and sluff off the nonrational, but rather a challenging notion that we have always been modern.

To be modern is a *relationship*, a *struggle*, *between worlds*, always attuning to contemporary conditions, always engaging in double worlds, espe-

cially when moving among different communities, whether rural and urban, posing the ancients against the moderns, negotiating racisms, or invoking Confucian obligations versus Daoist or Buddhist localisms. Faddish rhetoric that we have "never been modern," or claims that the purification of categories and intolerance of others are due to modern secularism, or that modernity and secularism have disenchanted the world, are just slogans, ways of marking friends and enemies for temporary advantage. Purifications of categories and worldly material realities are, after all, *ritual* procedures with histories back to the beginnings of humanity, some done for positive ecological and cosmological protection, but some done for hierarchical assertions of power and exclusions of minorities or claims to legitimate forms of life. Secularism in the past few centuries is not European Christianity lite, as some propose, but on the contrary has been the normative and legal political insistence on separation of church and state, so that multiple ways of living together, in an increasingly diverse world, are possible. Secularism in this sense has no inherent connection to forms of personal or communal religiosities except insofar as these negatively impose on the freedoms of others backed up by state power. Religious forms are gradually ramifying, spreading, *and changing*, as "Eastern" forms become more widespread as personal attachments, while "Western" forms also propagate in the East (and are reimported to the West), instilling new sect or cell structures of organizing and mutual aid in upward class or status mobility. Neither of these procedures, however, is new, and the Silk Road of Eurasia, among other cultural highways, has long seen such traffic and exchanges.

The world has not seen disenchantment so much as shifting forms and places of enchantments, and these in turn are imbricated with shifting understandings of both art and common sense. Without going into the genealogies of the shifting usages of terms such as *aesthetics*, *experience*, *symbol*, *allegory*, *metaphor*, *mimesis*, *appearance/reality*, *Vorbild* and *Nachbild*, *models of/models for*, *afterimages*, and *aftereffects*, one might say with R. Carlos Nakai, John Dewey, or Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The work of art would seem almost by definition to become an aesthetic experience. . . . [I]t suddenly takes the person[s] experiencing it out of the context of [their] lives, by the power of the work of art and yet relates [them] back to the whole of [their] existence. In the experience of art, there is a fullness of meaning which belongs not only to this particular content or object but rather stands for the meaningful whole of life" (Gadamer [1960] 1975, 63). This is not, or need not be, some idealistic mysticism or holism. Art has a restless inter-

rogative function, a leaning toward cultural critique (chapter 3), that comes out of putting things in play (chapters 1 and 2), opening them to comparison and conversation (chapters 2 and 5). Conversation and interpretation about art (as about other things) have the form of unpredictable turn taking and unpredictable lines of flight. Art, pragmatically, addresses and affects us, makes us seek its possible and restless meanings. When truly powerful, art has staying power, becomes part of the accumulative experiences that cultivate our understanding and that make us who we are, not only as individual persons, but also, more important, as participants in the various cultures and societies in which we find ourselves. Our relation to art that speaks to us is never ending, always there to be revisited, to be understood differently. This is true whether art is iconic and repetitive, as in the religious traditions of icons or statues of Buddha, as well as chants, or whether it is more indexical and interrogative of materials and forms, permutations and "repetitions with a difference," in order to create new frames of reference, or performance-art shocks to established understandings and structures of feeling. Our relation to art that speaks to us is, thus, also never merely subjective but is part of larger nexuses of cultural and social meanings and psychosocial behavioral repertoires. This is also why art can be therapeutic, bringing us out of ourselves, our particular obsessions, depressions, or passivities. This is intensively and viscerally the case when, in dance, theater, and ritual, the body is physically in play as part of the liminality of a kind of ritual process (whether secular or religious).

Common sense, the *sensus communis*, like art, has long genealogies, but the way in which I invoke it is the general sensibility of a time and place. I have argued, as have many others, that a new twentieth-century general bioecological sensibility is forming around the leading sciences of the day in at least three ways: (i) in our growing ecological and biological knowledge, explored in the increasingly important molecular and microbiological understandings of viruses, bacteria, and other species crossings (including human-affecting pandemics due to habitat displacements); (ii) in the increasingly important geophysical and climate understandings of intensifying hurricanes, typhoons, sea-level rise, and climate warming, and the associated biochemical cycles of the earth, or Gaian feedback, that can be perturbed into new patterns (such as the feared coming hothouse earth); and (iii) in the increasing surveillance and closed-circuit digital communication interferences, disruptions, and accidents, which require, in order to tame and resist them, new literacies and competencies to get inside the ma-

chines, algorithms, or software programs and which can generate Spamsoc forms that signal more than piracy, resistance, or subculture coding. All of these have a self-assembly or organic growth-like form in which no teleology operates. They are like the work of art itself: exploratory, experimental, and, when human controlled, self-reflective, offering the possibility of cultural critique and policy reform.

We are being tutored, in the 2010s and 2020s, in biosensibilities or bioecological sensibilities by pandemic viruses, from bacteriophages discovered in the Ganges in the nineteenth century and the influenza pandemic of 1918 to the more recent SARS, MERS, Ebola, and COVID-19, and many other infectious diseases in between, revealing what is normally hidden from view in our social as well as our medical knowledge. These tutorings repeatedly lay bare things that are very much out of alignment, such as the connections between our ecology or habitats and our social hierarchies and governance systems; and the inequalities and racisms that make our societies less resistant to new infectious diseases. Three viral forms of weakened resistance come loosely conjoined but act as perfect storms when they coincide: species-hopping viruses causing pandemics owing to habitat disturbances; disinvestments in social equality, education, and health care that make societies vulnerable; and the violence of structural racism, misogyny, and religious intolerance or exclusivism.

If I have first cited the life sciences as cognitive drivers of common sense —sources first of metaphor and then of growth in understanding—it is not to dismiss the important affordances and constraints of the technologies involved: painting, sculpture, weaving, sewing, cutting (chapters 2 and 5); printing technologies (block print, lithography, engraving, *giclée*) and photographic or filmic visual technologies (cinema, video, silent film, talkies, movement images, time images, event images, afterimages, cinerama, animation, virtual reality [chapters 1, 2, and 3]); tape recorders and letter writing (chapter 1); digital copies with total fidelity, simulacra with no originals, computer-assisted digital models and constructions (CAD), music and soundscapes (chapters 1 and 4); and of course the body itself in performance (chapter 5). Chapters 2, 3, and 4 in particular point to deeper explorations of technological change: uses of metal cutouts, analogies between lace and aluminum; behavioral metrics, accountability programs, and psychotropic drugs for behavioral modification; localized interacting through music with other forms and instruments of other places; ships and vessels in wood, stone engravings, and rattan carrying books, invasive species, seeds

for acculturation and medicinal gardens, trade goods, and multicultural and multilingual crews; ritual self-reflections modified in polished steel and multimedia installations; and transformations of the industrial design industry with CAD technologies.

If the arts are often anticipatory, it is because of these skeins of connections and interactions that accumulate unseen and unfelt, until they reach a conjuncture, phase transition, or tipping point when they emerge into general consciousness and discourses, sometimes causing shock and surprise but often generating a sense of recognition of things that one might have anticipated. The arts often pick up these partial connections, and shifts in common sense, spinning them out speculatively, contributing to what elsewhere I have called *ethical plateaus* where individual and policy decisions are made amid multiple competing imperatives, forces, trade-offs, and value concerns, whose consequences are new temporary stabilizations of conditions for further action. Such is the never-ending interpretive interrogation that the arts inform, perform, and explore and to which they contribute.

DECLASSIFYING MODERN VIOLENCE AND *AWAKENING INSECTS*

So not to end but to bring to a pause, a breathing in and out, the epilogue here invokes two reeds ("listen to the reed of the flute"), two contrasting and resonating art forms of today's growing common sense: a choreographer's common sense and a Buddhist common sense, both negotiating the modern worlds of violence and inequality.[1]

The first reed, from Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso) and Philadelphia, is a modern dance interrogation of the violence of riots and uprisings. One of the opening dance positions, again, at first seems like a cricket, spider, roach, or other insect. The dance interrogates both cultural resonances and abstracted masculinities (extending chapter 6).

The second reed, from Singapore in the pivot of East and West, is a form of modern Buddhist common sense, warning of trouble on the occasion of the Chinese New Year of 2020 and the season of the Awakening of Insects, just as the COVID-19 pandemic was beginning. One should not be misled by the setting of a temple or the conventions of the sermon: in many modern societies, successful commercial middle and upper classes, along with more moderately resourced people, invest discretionary money in places of wor-

ship and ritual activities as marks of (and competitions for) status, as community building, as networks for upward mobility, and as places for finding, as R. Carlos Nakai says in the epigraph above, reminders of "how you are as a human," or, as Max Weber ([1904] 1930) suggested, reminders of your "this worldly" ethics. Individuals pick and choose their communities and forms of ritual among the many varieties and interpretations on offer (or create their own), with greater fluidity than in the past. Traditions themselves modernize and reinvent themselves to attract shifting constituencies.

What is of interest in the ways common sense is formed is how these varied forms *relate to the changing world* of disasters and opportunities around them, and how *what once in* the natural world *were metaphors* for human self-recognition *have now become portals* for growing scientific knowledge, transforming from local knowledges (of bats, crickets, and locusts) to more regional and planetary ones (of climate change, viruses mapping habitat change, or crickets as models of dance positions, singing in seasonal change or modeling fight contests, and locusts' swarming behavior, already in the Bible story of the ten plagues). Crickets first: for example, "In Japan, the crickets sing in fall, giving voice to the season's transience and its reassuring melancholies. But in Florence . . . the cricket arrives in spring as a symbol of renewal, and its song is the soundtrack to lengthening days, to life lived outdoors" (Raffles 2010, 241). In China, the cricket that I'd misrecognized in chapter 6 but that nonetheless looks like the cricket Hugh Raffles poses on page 114 of his *Insectopedia* is an animal collected, traded, cultivated, and valued for its fighting virtues during the season of "happy times," the three months of autumn cooling before it descends into the earth until the spring awakening. It is rich in its metaphorical conveyances—the "three reversals, eight fears, five fatal flaws, seven taboos, five untruths"—and its five human qualities of loyalty to the emperor (trustworthiness, courage, loyalty, shame, and wisdom) and its seventy-two personalities or kinds.[2] Bats, of course, are suspected of being the carriers of the coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) that caused the COVID-19 pandemic of 2019–21, perhaps owing to their crowding by farmers. The *criquet pèlerin,* or locusts of North Africa, are known for their massive long-distance swarming, eating everything in sight, and are targets of an internationally funded trans-Sahelian locust-monitoring network, whose work however is hampered by being in war-conflict zones (Raffles 2010, 209).

> As a dancer, you are greater than what you do and society needs you. . . . Declassifying is a process of revealing, exposing what is hidden from view, obscured, unspoken.
>
> OLIVIER TARPAGA, "DECLASSIFIED MEMORY FRAGMENT," *DANCE JOURNAL*

There is an extraordinary scene in *Declassified Memory Fragment* that reminds me of Chandralekha's *Sharira* (chapter 6), when I first saw a cricket and then the *karuncha* bird in the equally extraordinary pose near the beginning of that dance. Here there is a spotlight on a seated figure, which looks like an African sculpture of a seated man. The arms move jerkily, casting shadows in the circle of light around the figure. The number of arms increases until the shadow looks like an eight-legged spider. One thinks perhaps of the spider spinning webs of meaning, the storytelling of Anansi of West Africa and Jamaica, or perhaps of Franz Kafka's Gregor Samsa, or Clifford Geertz's webs of interpretation. Gradually one becomes aware that there are three men seated behind each other on a machine-like contraption, which turns out to be a motorcycle frame. The soundtrack is a muezzin's call to prayer. One thinks perhaps it is Muslim West Africa, or perhaps a prayerful oasis of peace in a war-torn land. The men hold each other's hands, their arms forming arches over their heads, or looking like an array of motorcycle handlebars. They cuff one another on their bald heads, they put a hand over the man in front's mouth (don't tell, only show), they hold their three arms and hands out (look here), and all three bald heads come down as the muezzin ends (as perhaps in a prayer prostration). The men then make revving sounds of the motorcycle being started with a foot swipe and gaining speed. Two of the men get off and walk away. The third picks up the motorbike, puts it on an angle, climbs up on it acrobatically (to look out), then picks it up like a machine gun, focusing its headlight aggressively on the other men, and on the audience, sounding its rattatatata. One of the men now begins a high-stepping march across and around the periphery of the stage, until he comes on the third man, seated with a jacket on his head. He snatches the coat and tosses it aside as the two of them go into a choreographic and fast-paced dance of competition, fighting, and embrace, ending in an iconic scene of the two of them trying to put on one jacket, one in each sleeve. It is an absurd, friendly duet, but they represent, says Burkina Faso–born choreographer Olivier Tarpaga, Africa's political leaders' tendency to share power

as a way to subvert the democratic process. In the dance they pull and push, negotiating the ownership and subdivision of the jacket. In the end each tries to persuade the audience they are number one. This scene comes after an opening scene in which the offstage sound is a recording of the 2014 Burkina Faso demonstrations, the burning of public buildings and forcing out of office of the president who had been in power for twenty-seven years, who was trying to extend his rule.

Unlike Chandralekha's exploration of the power of the female body and recovery of past cultural forms, or Kiran Kumar's exploration of forms of masculinity (chapter 6), the dance pace is not meditatively slow but rather has the speed associated with the viral and its spread in conflagrations of uprisings and cytokine storms, or the fancy footwork and long-armed speed of Muhammad Ali (the celebrity boxer who called himself "the Greatest" and turned that sport into a verbal and acrobatic dance). Tarpaga and his choreographer wife, Esther Baker, use an all-male cast: "All of these wars, it's all about guys. All of the political struggles: guys. All guys, talking about how strong they are" (quoted in Whelan 2017). Many of the scenes are recognizable repertoires of male action scripts, posturing, strutting, competing, bonding. But there is also an exploration of historical echoes through the different musics performed by the four live musicians, who sometimes walk onstage and become part of the action, music that ranges from the rapid-fire song of a griot to guitar and other genres.

Dance, suggests Tarpaga, is a mode of survival. It abstracts the moves and feints, the temporary collaborations and antagonisms, that are the necessary repertoires in an uncertain world. Through abstraction, it declassifies, revealing root structures of passion and expressive body language underlying and hidden from view in everyday politeness or formality codes and ritualized norms of behavior. It can expose things that cannot be talked about.

THE AWAKENING OF THE INSECTS (2020)

A sermon for these times of COVID-19, floods, earthquakes, and locusts (compare the function of the gardens of hell invoked in chapter 2) was given on the eve of the Chinese New Year, January 25, 2020, at the small, but colorfully decorated, Theckchen Choling Temple, part of the Rime (nonsectarian) movement within Tibetan Buddhism, which invites laypeople, not just monks or nuns, to practice the dharma and is one of the Buddhist institutions promoting socially engaged Buddhism to care for and provide support

to the young, the old, and the needy regardless of race, language, or religion. Its leader, Singha Rinpoche (born Felix Lee), is a yogi, not a monk. He trained in Nepal. Until 1998 he was a chef and restaurant owner. When he was fifteen years old, a guru came to him in his dreams and told him to fulfill his vows made in his previous life to teach those who had no teachers. In 1998 he followed his gurus' advice to give up the restaurant and set up the temple, which he registered in 2001. It is named after the monastery of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama and has a large portrait of the Dalai Lama on the central altar.

At 10:30 p.m. I counted a hundred people already crowded together, seated on the floor inside, most holding one or more arrows of wealth (*daktar*) wrapped with cotton and a colorful cover at the top, with bright-colored ribbons that twirl when the arrow is in motion and an attached small mirror. The arrow is said to be a wand that can magnetize and attract auspiciousness, abundance, and prosperity. Each costs a few dollars donated to the temple. The mirror, too, attracts auspiciousness. More people gradually gathered, standing outside in the street.

Singha Rinpoche climbed onto his seat, speaking mainly in English and occasionally breaking into Chinese. He began a slow, halting, and somewhat stream-of-consciousness speech, which more or less made sense in its overall flow, starting with a mild Buddhist purgatory or hellfire kind of warning about the coronavirus in Wuhan, floods and earthquakes and tsunamis, food shortages, and sudden deaths that would come this year of the mouse or rat. (The rat is smart and cunning, but in commodity-conscious Singapore, the rat is most often depicted as a cute and friendly mouse, often Mickey Mouse.) And so we need to pray to the Medicine Buddha, of which there are eight kinds represented on the altar, including a blue one (who is not really blue but conceptually transparent, representing the blue sky when it is bright and sunny). Of course, we can't tell what is going to happen to any particular person amid all the deaths and illnesses, so try to be vegetarian, or eat less meat. Get your vaccinations, stay healthy, and go to the dentist. The syringe for injections is apparently metal. Metal and water (the vaccine) are opposed elements. They need to be harmonized (but don't let that stop you: get your vaccinations). Other hellish things are fear and ignorance. They can build into hate and disharmony. To keep balance, build up your merit. Do this by taking various vows, including the laymen vows, and if you break them (like drinking alcohol), the important thing is your motivation (keeping your will to do good strong, building up a resilient community, civil society).

Indeed, the *Straits Times* newspaper two mornings later read like his opening: it was full of accounts of the coronavirus in Wuhan and more than thirty dead in intense storms in Brazil, most victims killed in landslides or buried in destroyed homes. Belo Horizonte had 172 millimeters of rain in a twenty-four-hour period, the heaviest rainfall since records began 110 years ago. In the Philippines the Taal volcano—which erupted on January 12, shooting ash fifteen kilometers high and spewing lava that crushed scores of homes and killed livestock and crops—is tapering off. But there is a locust plague in East Africa with dense clouds of ravenous insects from Ethiopia and Somalia into Kenya, the worse infestation in decades (on locusts see note 2). The Food and Agriculture Organization estimates the size of one swarm in Kenya at 2,400 square kilometers, or up to 200 billion insects. It is the latest symptom of extreme weather, which started with three years of drought and ended in one of the wettest rainy seasons in four decades, with floods killing hundreds of people in East Africa. Off the coast of East Africa, there were more than eight cyclones, the largest number in one year since 1976, caused by the Indian Ocean Dipole, the irregular oscillation of sea surface temperatures in which the western Indian Ocean becomes alternatively warmer, then colder, than the eastern part. It has been the strongest positive phase of the dipole (warmer in the western Indian Ocean) in six decades, leading to floods in East Africa and severe drought in Australia and the worst bushfires in its history. Such extreme events will get worse and more frequent with climate warming.[3] No Buddhist preacher could have said it better.

Several things can be noted about the art of the sermon, which began to take on a pleasant rhythm in its constellation of indices, uncertainties, ambiguities, and indeterminacies, which still convey a sense of the present dangers in the world and ways to face them with a kind of anticipatory common sense.[4] The sermon was like a warm-up act, entertaining the audience for two hours until the midnight hour, when the actual prayer is finally done. It is performative, enrolling the lay audience with good humor and light explanations. The preacher positions himself as fallible: he can't remember the animals of the zodiac: "We've put it all down and pasted it all over the temple.... [Y]ou can take photo; we will also send it out through WhatsApp"). He doesn't expect you to follow all the rules: do the best you can. If you are right-handed, you can wave the *daktar* clockwise; if left-handed, counterclockwise. So maybe the vaccination syringes mix metal and water, but you can make them balance rather than conflict: get your vaccinations. This year

would be a good one to get your vaccinations. Balance and harmony are the goals, against hate and division. There are larger causes in the world than we can fathom. Karma is always there, but you have to be prudent. He harmonizes science and religion. One gets the sense that if he were talking to a more scientific audience, he would simply up the details of the science. He makes fun of himself (I'm Chinese too; we all love money, but fulfillment, not money, is the goal of the arrow of fortune). He makes lighthearted fun of Buddhism's earlier failure in India and of the Indians in the audience (you should be embarrassed not to have held on to a good thing). And in the end the prayer is about self-cultivation, everyone repeating in call-and-response: "I confess all my negativities known and unknown, by choice or by ignorance, or by conditions; I rejoice in the virtues of all holy and all ordinary beings."

It is worth noting the sequencing of the sermon form, beginning, of course, with all the evils that were likely to happen in the coming year. People nodded as he ticked them off: it's going to be a year of sudden deaths, sudden sicknesses, plagues, floods and landslides, earthquakes and tsunamis, and food shortages. Some New Year! But, he says, there is no point in living in fear. Stay healthy. Emotionally, the arc of the sermon begins in ignorance (of the future) and fear (of the bad things that will happen); it moves in its middle passage to what one can control (self, vows, vaccinations); it concludes in equanimity and commitment to care for others. This arc occurs in miniature in the opening passage and then is repeated over the longer sermon. The second part, after the recitation of evils, is the money ask: to expand the temple. It comes with a reminder of the social history of religion in Singapore: it is unusual to have a freehold property in which one can invest and which one can hold for longer than thirty years. Although Singapore has some twenty-eight Buddhist and Daoist Chinese temples, thirty-eight Hindu Temples, eight *gudwaras*, two synagogues, sixty-seven mosques, and four hundred churches, many of the small Tibetan and other Buddhist temples as well as Chinese clan house temples, usually in shophouses, are in the lower-rent area of the Geylang district, with leases of no more than thirty years, as a means, it is often argued, to keep them from blocking redevelopment whenever the government wishes to repossess the land. Freehold is especially rare for newly founded temples such as this one.

The third movement of the speech, done casually and lightly, is devoted to explanations of symbols and ritual procedures. These are told not so much doctrinally but rather so people understand and are able to work with the

symbolism if they so wish. Of these, the most interesting perhaps (both as a general ritual and in comparison with rites of fire in Zoroastrianism and Vedic Hinduism) is the taking of a flame (lighted incense stick) back home and then returning it (via a candle) to the temple. Keeping the flame going while walking is a challenge; do it if you can. There is the multiplicity of eight Medicine Buddhas, one particularly for skin problems, from eczema to skin cancer. There is a reminder of the disjunction between the physical icon and its symbolism. For instance, the lapis lazuli body of the Buddha statue is not about the material gemstone or symbol of wealth but about it being the sky, clear and bright, transparent, sky-blue, a symbol of fulfillment and enlightenment. The colorful ribbons on the wand of wealth and auspiciousness are the colors of the rainbow, through which the Buddhas walk, or which, in general, represents the philosophical position of "dancing in the space between," being able to navigate with equanimity amid the troubles of the world.

People are used to deity multiplicity, deities of varying status, mostly humans who have become deified (in the Daoist conceptions) or enlightened (the Buddhas). More complicated—and he spends more time on it—is the multiplicity of calendars, of the temporalities. Like the Hebrew calendar, the Chinese calendar is a combined solar/lunar calendar. He admonishes that tonight is the lunar New Year, the most popularly celebrated night. But, reverting back to environmental and agricultural concerns, much more significant is the solar New Year, which will be on February 4.

That is the time *of the awakening of the insects*, the beginning of spring. It is the "shift change," when a different set of deities comes to work. In the sixty-year cycle of the lunar calendar, the year of the rat begins today, but the agricultural year begins with the thunderstorms of spring, the moistening of the earth, and *the awakening of hibernating insects*. (The solar year begins on the winter solstice, December 21–22, and the awakening of the insects is Jing Zhe, 驚蟄, the third of the twenty-four divisions or seasons.) It is a time of renewal but also danger: the humid earth, rains, insects, viruses, and bacteria can bring illness. Fish also begin to move from deeper to shallower waters to feed and spawn, and other hibernating animals also begin to wake. The *white tiger* begins to hunt and can cause destruction and conflict, and so there is ritual drawing of its image, which is "fed" with smeared pig blood, so that it will not bite people. Similarly, there is a "villain hitting" ritual of various forms in which, for instance, the names of one's enemies are written on paper or wood sticks, and those are beaten, to get rid of the bad luck of the past year and create good luck for the future.

Although he insists that the date of the New Year in the solar calendar is fixed on February 4, like that of the secular or Gregorian calendar (January 1), because of different latitudes across China and Southeast Asia, the timing of these natural features can vary and may be celebrated at different times, from early February to early March. February 4 seems to be the agreed-on start of spring in the Chinese solar calendar, while the next unit, beginning February 19, is that of "Rain" or "Thunder," which causes the third unit "Insects Awaken," beginning on March 6.[5] His calculations may not quite work out, but never mind, they are all written down, and we'll send them by WhatsApp, or you can photograph the posters with your cell phone. In any case, as the locusts and viruses teach us, the awakening of the insects may be a metaphor of the agrarian cycle, but it can also be a metaphor for coming disasters.

BREATHE OUT AND START ANEW (RETROSPECT — PROSPECT)

> "Indonesia" by this time has become for me not only a political and geographical location but any place where electricity surges through the body and words come out.
>
> JAMES SIEGEL

In this book I have tried to introduce producers of cultural critique and ask us to engage more deeply than by filing them under conventional categories of art history, film criticism, curatorial slogans, or modern nation-state names. I ask us to consider the psychic histories they excavate and transmit, their experimental methods, their transnational engagements, and their deep local attachments. I ask us to contemplate what these cultural critiques, artworks, and morphed genres tell us about our current historical horizons, those we are leaving behind, and those into which we might be entering.

On the Pacific Rim, we find the hypermodern interlaced with the hypermantic (shamanic, ghost- and spirit-filled) societies; palimpsestic traumas interlaced with technocratic planning that erases and buries histories; industrial-scale sand mining and mineral extraction interlaced with silicon wafer foundries and invisible surveillance infrastructures; geomorphic explosions and earth trembling interlaced with delicate craftsmanship; and the frictions of generational change from the Cold War, guerrilla struggles, and antidictatorship struggles interlaced with financial crises and pandemic-sentinel vigilance or laxity.

In the Southeast Asian pivot between East and West, we find thalassocratic legacies contending with mercantile, finance, and state capital; liberalism countered by meritocratic illiberalism; plural-society governance contending with unforgiving human capital markets; broadcast voices (speak proper English, Mandarin) contending with demotic ones (dialect, social media, creolization of languages, dress and behavior); innovation-design marketing of the digital and fourth-generation industrial revolution, or 4IR (with affordances of modifiability, modularity, access control, and database retrievability) contending with slow, contemplative cultural arts (theater, film, dance); generational frictions and differential experiences; and now-uncertain shifts in hegemonic powers.

PROBING ARTS

In chapters 2 and 3, I raised questions about the form of the arts in the various aftermaths of disasters of what we are beginning to call the Anthropocene, the learning to live in natures of varied toxicities and viruses rather than in a nature thought of as pristine. They utilize a vocabulary of global popular cultures, increasingly in electronic and informatic forms that toy with us as they track our comings and goings. They track and refract the great migrations that climate change is pushing, and internal political-sociological conflicts that turn against intellectuals, physicians, and the "luxury" of the arts. They look beneath the skin at the psychological stress and distress in self-destructive cuttings, in our intestines, in the electromagnetic waves that disturb our neurological systems (chapter 3); and in the toxicities of mining and radiation and migration (chapter 2). Chapter 4 explores a decade-long video project using the metaphor of maritime sea states (from calm to turbulent) to track terraforming (land reclamation) and the growth of a "sea state" or island in the sea, linked by underwater internet cables, oil caverns, and maritime trade. The transformative effects of the video camera make us see labor, invasive species, legal maneuverings, underground and underwater, coastal zoning, safe seas, and tropical entropy in ways not usually available to those who live on the ground inside the city. In seeing the land from the sea, chapter 5 supplements chapter 4, this time through music and rattan sculptures that encourage us to teach parents the value of storytelling about themselves to their children (to not rely on the media and to counter fundamentalism). Chapter 6 turns to the body, charting the archipelago through dance, stretching muscle memory to explore be-

neath the codifications of dance forms, looking to raw moves or "indices of vanishment," and new pedagogies extending as far as California.

The Jakarta show was perhaps the first to strike me with the intuition that I might be experiencing something new being made evident in Asia, that there are new modes of metabolizing art forms that I've tentatively dubbed *synthetic realism*. The intuition was partially reaffirmed by my engagement with Takashi Murakami's monumental mural installation *The 500 Arahats* (2012) in the aftermath of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear meltdown and radiation release, about which I have written in *Anthropology in the Meantime* (Fischer 2018). The Seoul show further reinforced this intuition, expanding it into filmic and video installation modes. Park Chan-kyong's *Belated Bosal* (2019) shows us an irradiated forest, a female shaman, artists creating a coffin with a funerary fire of cardboard and paper—all to be encased in a shipping container—and a funeral in the forest prepared by container ship, truck, and cranes. (As I write amid the 2020 COVID-19 or SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, images of refrigerated morgues in containers in New York City come to mind.) Ayoung Kim's video installation abstracts in stylized scripts the bureaucratic interrogations that attempt to block current human global migrants and abstracts migrants into metallic cubes that themselves are migrants from mined and geomorphic origins. The surfaces of our physical, legal, and commonsense worlds cover over archaic ritualized openings to the worlds beyond, as well as to Gaian or biochemical cycles only slowly coming to scientific and collective political consciousness. The camera stares beyond the surface into pasts, repetitions, and, with special lenses (X-ray, gamma ray, electron tunneling microscopes, for instance), networks and interactions beyond the visible, valuable for knowing how to build our futures. Ayoung Kim's vision, like Entang Wiharso's, incorporates the materialities of the earth and its living conditions, while also pointing to the administered state powered increasingly by big data, artificial intelligence, and algorithmically driven security systems trying to contain uncertain futures.

In chapter 3 the turn taking of the two artists introduces curation as both staging and technique. The installation unfolds, almost in Freudian fashion, toward primal scenes in a six-act theater, beginning in an antechamber or green room where obvious older tropes are hung up (on the wall, put aside) and at an entry that establishes the anxieties of border crossings, multiple-identity existences, and gender intersectionalities in a world that often has not quite yet caught up. The art is colorful and joyous, full of darkness but also jouissance in being able to portray the world from an ironic,

sometimes even comic, perspective, drawing on the experiences of living in multiple worlds of pop culture, serious history, and personal ability to navigate a steady course. Questions of borrowing across cultures are not identity threatening but on the contrary contribute to synthesizing a new idiom, a synthetic realism.

Both the Jakarta and Seoul installations are situated in contemporary atmospheres, the Jakarta one in the post-Reformasi period and the growing threat from conservative and militant Islam (which succeeded, for instance, in ousting a popular Christian governor of Jakarta, the ally of a popular president, using trumped-up and inflamed claims of blasphemy against Islam);[6] and in Australia, of inflamed discussions about interning refugees (powerfully articulated via smuggled cell phone reports by a Kurdish-Iranian writer interned on Manus Island, who won Australia's Victoria Prize for Literature);[7] and the Seoul one in juxtaposition with increasing discussions of the ravages of the Anthropocene, including the plight of the Yemeni refugees on Jeju Island, and of dealing with recovery from disasters such as the capsizing of the *Sewol* ferry, or the careful shifting of wartime ghosts into ancestors, poisonous knowledge that can perhaps be repaired in a postmemory generation.

In chapter 4 Charles Lim Yi Yong's videography uses geometric mirroring and inversions to show us our technological modernities from the sea, and chapters 5 and 6 provide parallel sea quests for different sorts of histories that once were the pride of thalassocracies and ports as central to the Southeast Asian archipelago as Venice to the Mediterranean, a point stressed by Zai Kuning at his Venice Biennale show. Singapore was, like Venice, a fulcrum of thalassocracies, small coastal polities that attempted to control the sea lanes and articulate upland river basins with ocean trade. Civilizational religions and cosmologies—Melanesian and Melayu, Chinese, Hindu and Buddhist, Islamic and Christian—spread and layered themselves across these realms, while smaller trading peoples prospered alongside (Parsis, Jews, Armenians). Rather than rehearsing the official stories of these histories, the artists lead us to conversations about cultural circulations in music, dance, and the arts as aesthetic and philosophical inquiries about the human place in the world, about the play of the affinities and differences that make up vibrant and resilient cultural tapestries and that militate against fundamentalisms, prejudices, and the turning of neighbors into alien others.

Zai Kuning, a master artist of many talents, recalls to memory, consciousness, and pleasure a wide palimpsest of cultural resources—music, boatbuilding, sea peoples who live on the water, the poetics of sea and land,

environmental and cosmological attachments, and the processes of performance arts and storytelling—for reviving undersongs of meaning that lie largely submerged in contemporary Malaysia, Singapore, and Southeast Asia. Kuning's artistry is a threefold practice and pedagogy: (a) artwork as *cultural critique*, consciousness-raising, and reattunement of a cultural ethos; (b) *pedagogy for parents,* as well as children, on *how to actively tell stories* that empower lives and provide the conditions of possibility for *creative and critical*, rather than repetitive (*taqlid*) thinking; and (c) *opening of the sensorium*.

In chapter 6 we follow some lineages of dance traveling in a kind of figure eight following a loop through South and Southeast Asia and then another loop to Europe and California, returning to the sources from which it springs. It is not the finished dances so much as the new vocabularies and quests for self-discovery by dancers and choreographers that I try to access. Modern movement and visual performance arts are invented by locating anew cultural, personal, and anatomical possibilities, many already inscribed in ancient sculpture and scripture (*shastra*) but frozen or fossilized or forgotten and revived or reanimated through experimentation, conceptual exploration, and abstraction, generating both minimalist forms and expansive ones through newly enriched media affordances. In a way, in chapters 2 and 6, a more electromagnetic or electrical engineering loop is also made, turning the experimentation and abstraction toward artificial intelligence control of the body's movements. In some of the performance modalities of modern dance (Kiran Kumar, Edith Podesta), abstraction provides a touchstone for my thinking about the calligraphic analogy to dance, or as Chandralekha would say, the slow erasing of the narrative into movement. Raw moves into pure movement.

My intuition, hunch, hypothesis, or speculation is that what I have been experiencing through these art worlds is a set of new languages and platforms of art that are appearing with force in Southeast Asia, East Asia, and the Pacific. These works of art are no longer constrained by nationalist identity politics or periodization of art styles. Postindependence, post-decolonialization, post-Reformasi, they are part of the breakout of Southeast Asian and East Asian art onto the global stage, part of the Asian shift in "what is happening" generally. They embroider in older references but move confidently beyond them. With both humor and a steady demand for a humane world beyond gender inequality or peripheralization, their art points to the faults of the world and ways to move on.

Appendix

THE YEAR 2020 AND THE *CAMOUFLAGE PAINTING SERIES*: CONVERSATIONS WITH ENTANG WIHARSO

The detail of Entang Wiharso's *Flag of Surrender* (2021) is from his *Camouflage Painting Series* using glitter and acrylic, done during, and in response to, the year 2020—the year of the COVID-19 pandemic and of economic disruption; of massive wildfires across the globe (Australia, California, Brazil, Siberia); of heat waves killing people, land animals, and marine life; of the Black Lives Matter movement protesting police murders of Black youths and demanding social justice reform; of the armed insurrectionist attack by white supremacists on the US Capitol at the invitation of the defeated former president; and of attempts by Republican politicians, by passing voting restrictions targeted at black voters, to reintroduce Jim Crow protections of privilege and power for themselves.

I hear Wiharso's title as a kind of ellipsis, not so much an image of surrender as an indication of many things out of control and a phase transition toward a greater ecological consciousness that we must achieve if the earth as we know it is to survive.

FIRST READING: I see in the picture not only the fires that raged across the world in 2020 but an ancient sturgeon skeleton, a species dating back to the age of dinosaurs, once abundant along the North American Atlantic coast, until fished in the nineteenth century to near extinction for its meat and its high-quality caviar (the Black Gold Rush). It is like Wiharso's iconic big fish (chapter 3), but here the fish's head has ears. "Yes," Wiharso tells me, "it is like a hybrid animal, actually it can be fish or it can be something like an ancient animal, a prehistoric animal." I remark on the dramatic power of the fire in the painting. He replies:

It can also be about the environment, like the wildfires in California, and the man-made fires in Indonesia, or, you know, natural disasters, maybe man-made in the beginning and then becoming a natural disaster. The ground often has embers or hot spots, for example, the peat in Kalimantan (Borneo), or areas where they mine for coal underneath the ground. People use fire to clear the land for agricultural purposes, for example, to create plantations for palm oil production, which began during the Suharto era. The first big fire happened in 1997: after they harvested the trees for palm oil the situation escalated and the fires spread. Many companies are involved in ongoing land clearing and the situation escalates during the dry season.

I add that the dark sky is really dramatic and suggest that it be read as either sky or black rain. He replies, "Yeah, black rain, or something because of the smoke, right?" I continue to probe: "It has got all these different gorgeous colors like silk saris, or even Persian (Yazdi) *termeh* (silk brocade)."

Camouflage, he replies: "It is part of the *Camouflage Painting Series*, called camouflage because [although] *you see this motif, the camouflage covers it*." I imagine a pink blob with a shadowy figure inside might be a floating brain or a womb and embryo. He replies, "Yes, memory, like history, sometimes people forget." I ask further, "These stones, do they mean anything in particular?" He replies, "Yes, the stone is like part of the landscape, but the stone[s] always have a narrative meaning." I ask, "Am I just imagining here, or on the top of the stone here is there an eye and a beak?" "Yes," he replies, "this is like faces," and notes that in Java, in the Middle East, in many places, stones are often mystical, have a kind of deep profundity and compassion (see chapter 2), and I recall for him the Persian *sang-e sapur*, the stone of patience to which one tells one's troubles. The spotted dogs are familiar from Wiharso's earlier work, but I probe a bit more. He replies, "These are a kind of hybrid, like a dog or hyena, some are more dog, some more hyena." Hybrid dogs and hyenas are symbolic historically in art and metaphor ("dogs of war," "laughing hyenas," the South African hyena-dog, or *Lycaon venaticus*), but they are also more specifically in Wiharso's paintings evocations of ṭerror and repression under, and in the transition from, Suharto's dictatorship. In this painting, he tells me, "the hyenas allude to fanatical political followers, hungry for conflict and power, ready to move en masse if ordered to by their leader, as we've seen in the United States under [Donald] Trump" (plate 34).

GENDER, CLASS, AND AUTHORITARIANISM: They bray and threaten to attack and are held off (in the scene on the cover) by a woman (like the women leaders of the Black Lives Matter movement), while the man waves a white flag. I think of George Floyd, Michael Brown, and Eric Garner, who offered no resistance, not because they lacked masculinity, but because their masculinity was a target, just as in civil wars (Beirut, Aceh) it is often the women who have to defend the men (Cooke 1988; Accad 1992; M.-J. Good 2015). In another canvas of the *Camouflage Painting Series*, the dog-hyenas threaten a yellow-haired man in coat and tie (Wall Street or money's corrupt power) who stands stiffly with a broken thumb amid cacti, small fires, stones, and disarticulated, sun-bleached skeleton parts. Wiharso in an email clarifies: "The dog-hyenas are not threatening him, they are following him. They are waiting for his command. This figure has one element—the yellow hair—which is familiar, alluding to [former president] Trump. *This is a kind of test for viewers*; do they identify him? Because *Trump is hard to see or understand for many* and *for others, he is present everywhere* [emphasis added]. He is omnipresent, ubiquitous, always present." This canvas, or section of the larger work, is called *Rope from the Sky*: there is a cactus with a rope hanging like a noose and a stylized fire climbing it or hanging from it. In a series of smaller pieces, Grant Wood's *American Gothic* is transformed by the surrounding havoc: the farmer holds a broken pitchfork, while he and his wife or daughter are pockmarked with disease, as their farmhouse burns behind them; in other paintings the fires destroy both a huge tree and a lamppost (nature and technology); a noose hangs from a beam as a figure, with his back to the viewer, watches the burning scene.

MOOD AND MOVEMENT: The canvases will eventually be assembled into a several-sided diorama-style installation. I return to the colors and the glitter, and Wiharso talks about how difficult it was to learn how to control the glitter (which dries into the liquid acrylic paint). He jokes that working with the glitter is like a bad old craft and "not a good connotation for fine art, but [laughing infectiously] then I thought: So I'll use it! It's like a broken part. You know, there are so many underthoughts. It is about the feeling—you can read it as a concept, but this painting is about the *feeling*." The glitter allows the painting to change mood and feeling as the light changes: it looks different in the evening in artificial light than in daylight, and it moves as you do. More specifically, he writes in an email:

Rope from the Sky [plate 35]. The main material in the painting is glitter. The glitter functions as an expression of unfixed perception and explores ways we reveal and hide events, conditions and experiences that effect history. The idea came from my research for the Guggenheim Fellowship, which included travel through the landscape of the Southern States and a visit to Gettysburg, where I saw the large military diorama depicting the Battle of Gettysburg. These experiences left me with pressing questions about ongoing racial conflict. I became interested in creating a work that presented historical content through my perception of the mindscape in the US, and found the use of dioramas to create a visceral experience of historical events compelling. There are four elements in this painting translating the southern landscape—desert landscape, wild animals (scary looking, dangerous), a very distinctive male figure, and bubble forms that allude to our brains or memories. They are in the setting to create nonlinear narrative. The man is the main figure commanding the wild animals, who represent followers, an un-controllable and latent danger. In the portraiture of the man, he has lost his thumb, which is a representation of having lost his power or dignity. The animals look like dogs or hyenas. I want to make a connection through the visual presentation of a kind of fable to suggest a hidden meaning. This man's portrait is often recognized as Trump. This is a kind of test to show how Trump is a very powerful image and very recognized. In fact, the figure only has one element that is like Trump and that is his hair. I remember during Suharto's rule in Indonesia, it is an authoritarian time, everybody knew his image, which was very powerful. (During Suharto's rule people often called him *Semar* to position him in a more powerful setting, like a God. Semar is a character in Javanese mythology who frequently appears in *wayang* shadow plays. He is one of the *punokawan* clowns, who is divine and very wise. He is regarded by some as the most sacred figure in *wayang* and said to be a god in human form. Suharto encouraged this representation because it confirmed his power.) When I made this work, I had these two figures in my mind, who have a similar level of fame and are adored by a lot of people. The *Camouflage Series* reflects unconscious desires to erase or dispel fear, and the constant questions I have about my placement as an immigrant and POC [person of color] in the larger narrative.

If one juxtaposes the Gettysburg diorama with the *Camouflage* murals, as he did in a talk at Harvard in 2022, his idea of living in a double horizon is vividly dramatized (Wiharso, 2022b).

ON INTERPRETATION VERSUS STRUCTURE OF FEELING: "*You can read it as a concept, but it is about the feeling, this painting is about the feeling*" (emphasis added). It is about the pervasive mood of the four long years of the Trump presidency ending in 2020. He says:

> Personally, I want to describe this feeling, like, you know, during the George Floyd [murder by police, which] somehow is caught on camera, and then [disseminated]; if not [had it not been filmed by a courageous teenager], you know: nothing, no consequences. So it is very interesting like this [pointing at an object in the painting]: there is something evident, but sometimes [you] have to find [or search for] it because the system [is] covering [it up], you know, the bad guy or something terrible. So this is kind of like my feeling, like baring my feeling [about] what's happening because of technology or somebody . . . like, you know, the mysterious killings [the so-called ninja killings, explored in James Siegel's *A New Criminal Type in Jakarta*, 1998], the same thing: somebody just goes missing; or that "bad guy," even though he is not a bad guy, but it had to be justified [by naming him so]. So many questions.

SO MANY QUESTIONS: We talk about Franz Kafka's stories (he lights up), and as I describe Howard Caygill's (2017) brilliant interpretation of Kafka's writings through his passion as an insurance accountant, fascinated by how one might determine what could be counted as a natural disaster and what could have corporate liability, and further how these things can be so indistinct that everything could be dismissed as an accident, because if a stone falls from the top of a quarry (one of his key scenes), it has been building up over a long time, and it just so happens that a man is standing there and is killed by the stone. How do you explain that? Do you use (Wiharso chimes in, "an accident or because somebody . . .")? Kafka found that the quarries were cutting costs, and so they piled up stones near the top of the quarry, and, of course, some could fall, so there could be liability for the corporations. But the corporations had gotten the government to pass a law that the insurance companies could not come in and look at their private properties, so that they could not be caught for liability because it couldn't be proved. Kafka secretly took pictures, and then (Wiharso chimes in again, "They couldn't hide it anymore") they couldn't hide it anymore. Wiharso says:

> This echoes to me the concept behind my *Expanded Dream* installation, currently being prepared for the Wolfsburg Museum, about the mud flows

in East Java, which occurred when a sinkhole emerged during the drilling by an oil company. It was unclear if the disaster resulted from the drilling or from an earthquake and volcanic eruption that occurred at the time. I created the installation called *Expanded Dream* in 2011, five years after the disaster. These kinds of questions are so interesting to me. There are so many factors at play in what happened. Scientists are still questioning the possible connections. So it is very interesting to consider who is responsible. I did the whole installation using lava ash from Mt. Merapi and graphite. It will be shown in 2021 in Germany, in the exhibition *Oil: Beauty and Horror in the Petrol Age*.

INTERRUPTION AND INSPIRATION: Wiharso had won a Guggenheim Fellowship to travel the United States and produce art reflecting the cultural landscape as he saw and experienced it. The pandemic put much of the planned travel on hold, and instead he produced a series of paintings, of which *Flag of Surrender* and *Rope from the Sky* are two pieces of a large new installation, *Camouflage Painting Series*, which was scheduled to show at Art Basel, Miami. This (along with *Expanded Dream*) is not the first time he has turned his attention to the disruption of the environment: he has a series on the corals, seagrasses, and sea creatures of the coasts of Indonesia, which contain also some of the discards of political turmoil and cultural obsolescence, within which new hybrid growths occur. And of course, as seen in chapter 3, he has always been attentive to the "movementality" of the volcanic and quaking earth of Indonesia and the Pacific Ring of Fire interacting with the nervous systems of human beings and animals.

Notes

INTRODUCTION

1 By *semiotically* or *linguistically fraught*, I am thinking of such diagnoses as digitally enabled "post-truth" conditions of "equiprobability, where virtually any statement can be challenged at very low, or no cost" (Cesarino 2020), and cryptographic models of proxy social media dissemination in order to disappear sources, as part of hybrid warfare and politics, inserted into national political systems (Leirner 2020). On anthropology as a target, see Neiburg and Ribeiro (2020), Cabral de Oliveira and Marini (2020), and Cavignac (2020), but also more generally the role of anthropology in promoting what Ronaldo de Almeida (2020) calls "compensatory politics" (investing in those who have had low social and economic capital), seen as inimical to radical neoliberalism.

2 In an earlier, more fully global conception, two other essays added how industrial design and color theory simultaneously renarrate modern American and Iranian culture (in the work of Parviz Yashar) and how northeastern Brazil mixes Cinema Novo, spaghetti western, and American film in a renewed *antropofagia* to contest pandemics and fascism (in Kleber Mendonça Filho and Dornelles' *Bacurau*). For the former, see the cover art and pp. 248–53 in Fischer (2009); for the latter, see Fischer (2021).

3 An attentive reviewer suggests a comparison-contrast with anthropologist Jeanne Favret-Saada's figure of "caughtness" as a way of positioning the ethnographer, while preserving the aporia of whether the new apperception and understanding is a matter of serendipity or of overdetermination. Favret-Saada's use of caughtness is more linguistic and performative and is an extreme case (obligatory) of being caught up in or identifying within a discursive field of action, while Walter Benjamin's notions of a fire alarm and of sudden lightning flashes of illumination have to do with a break in normalcy that reveals an underlying terrain or contradiction of social forces, such that it can mobilize political action.

4 In my two examples here, the one, Matisse, is a visual recognition of what had

been a textual description of a Fauvist technique, linking the emotional palettes in the novel to a painter's technique of color, volume, and affect. I am now caught by, and in, that nexus—and so, too, by, and in, the second example of film soundtracks (and their narrative titles) that for me reveal and illuminate the composition or choreography of intense emotional registers in a novel's text. But Favret-Saada's concern in her accounts of contemporary witchcraft in France has to do with participant observation: she argues for a more varied terrain of positionings to be explored than is poorly glossed in anthropology as "participant observation" (Favret-Saada [1977] 1980, 2012).

5 On museums as reworked spaces for cultural critique, see the artwork of Eric Avery, placing an HIV/AIDS consulting room in the Harvard Fogg Museum, conceived as doing institutional therapy (Fischer 2000). But see also the important three volumes coedited by Ivan Karp (Karp and Lavine 1991; Karp, Kreamer, and Lavine 1992; Karp et al. 2006) on the reconstruction of civic and community museums, especially the transformation of colonial museums in Africa into national ones accessible to, and open to criticism by, all citizens; and the Italian philosopher Mario Perniola's (1995) attention to art museums as spaces where art is detached from its contexts and performs something like "ritual without myth." See also now David Joselit's (2020) lecture on the National Gallery Singapore along with the M+ museum in Hong Kong and the Zeitz Museum in Cape Town as examples of new museums of modern and contemporary art in the age of globalization, built in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, designed by European star architects, around a building rooted to its historical site, meant to garner international recognition and to produce publicity and tourism. Much of what Joselit says comes from Singapore's own planning and publicity documents (including the museum's own exhibit on its design and renovation), but his cherry-picked examples ignore places like the Tate Modern in London, which fits his model equally but disturbs his division between Europe and the Rest. The National Gallery Singapore, in any case, is only one of a complex of newly expanded museums within walking distance, including the Singapore Art Museum (a former Catholic school, which for years was the premier art venue for new works from the region and is currently undergoing renovation and expansion); the lotus blossom–shaped Science/Art Museum, including a performance venue; the Singapore National Museum (the former Raffles Museum, which fits Karp's civic museum category but with a new glass building extension and a performance venue); and the Asian Civilizations Museum, also with a new extension (which fits Joselit's encyclopedic museum category); as well as a series of arts venues such as the Substation (connected by a walkway to the Singapore National Museum and to the new Funan Theater), art schools (LaSalle School of the Arts, with its spectacular new building of six glass faceted towers around an atrium with black stone and aluminum exterior cladding; Nanyang Academy of the Arts,

with more functional modern buildings; and the sculptural, vertical-gardened, naturally ventilated machine for wind School of the Arts, or SOTA), and the performance and art spaces at the Esplanade. The Nanyang Technical University's Center for Contemporary Art (NTU CCA), in the Gillman Barracks arts complex, is another important venue for art being produced today. Of importance to the anthropologist are the communities of conversation in and across these spaces, rather than typologizing and panoptic commentary from the former metropoles and imperial centers; the kernel, as Rumi would say, not merely the shell.

6 Fausto quite incisively reviews the "so-called anthropology of art" debates among Alfred Gell, Philippe Descola, and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, noting archly (and correctly, in my view) that models of art "cannot resolve to two terms and cannot be stabilized by a foundational anthropomorphism" (2020, 13). Quite to the contrary of their premature theoretical reductions (the film, not the footage), Fausto suggests that the Amerindian problematic or ambition involves "generating the most complex and paradoxical images with multiple referents, recursively nested, oscillating between figure and ground" (22). This, it strikes me, is a far more felicitous basis for a general anthropology of art that is not forever bound to Christian theological obsessions with images and presence (which both he and, even more in depth, Carlo Severi analyze [Severi, 2015, 2018]). It is a fascinating discussion, but my net is wider than Fausto's framing around the genesis of presence in ritual and undoing the Protestant Reformation (Bruno Latour's purifications, Latour 1993) and Protestant and Catholic missionaries' efforts to undo Amerindian cosmologies and rituals. Fausto's work builds, in a way, on Claude Lévi-Strauss's fundamental understanding that binary oppositions are generative (not stable) and so is able to build on his work, as well as situate his analyses of Amerindian myth and ritual within the much larger and growing corpus of ethnographic work (Lévi-Strauss 1964–71).

7 Influenced by Hans-Georg Gadamer's genealogical discussion of *common sense* (Lat. *sensus communis*) in his magisterial *Truth and Method* (1960 [1975]), particularly as inflected by Giambattista Vico, I first invoked common sense as the kind of shared conventional wisdoms and normative understandings that can at certain historical times profoundly shift. They can overthrow *ancien régime* practical agreements underpinning both governance and social relations, constituting a shift in paradigms in the language of Thomas Kuhn, in ideological hegemonies in the language of Karl Marx and Antonio Gramsci, or in epistemes in the language of Michel Foucault. The case I was working on at the time was the Iranian Revolution. I opened with questions about the changing *sensus communis* in Iran and detailed the contests for hegemony over social and moral reason among and within at least three major traditions of thought (a secular liberal understanding of a renewed phase in the century-long bour-

geois revolution, an Islamic understanding that democratic forms should always be under the hegemony of clerical interpretations, and a socialist understanding of class struggle first in the feudal agrarian system and increasingly in the industrial working classes). The arts played critical roles in these contests (Fischer 1980, 1989, 1993, 2003; Fischer and Abedi 1990b).

8 See Gadamer (1960) for a more detailed philosophical genealogy. Among the key steps are locating conventional wisdom in both sensory and rational sources; moving from these cognitive groundings in the "brain" or "mind" to more socially mediated understandings built up from shared experiences and emotions but subjected to skepticism, interrogation, and debate; and thereby generating evolving, changing, and competing moral norms and taste cultures.

CHAPTER ONE. CHALLENGING ART AS CULTURAL SYSTEMS

This essay originally was presented as the Clifford Geertz Memorial Lecture, April 25, 2019, Princeton, New Jersey. It was subtitled "Light Shows, Shadow Plays, Pressure Points."

1 For complementary accounts focused on museums and curators' framings, see Tan B. and Yun (2017) and Yap (2016); and on performance, see Ade and Lim (2016).

2 Interview, June 8, 2016, tape 2. All direct quotations are from my interviews with Charles Lim, but I dispense here with marking each with a date. If there is a need, these can be recovered from my field notes, typed transcripts, or tapes.

3 A new Singapore Army promotional video released on July 30, 2019, shows the eighty-eight-hectare "SAFTI city," or Singapore Armed Forces Training Institute training grounds for urban warfare, to be opened in phases from 2023. It is a video remarkably like the Lim spoof, made up as a high-tech video game.

4 See Sandi Tan, question-and-answer session, Brattle Theatre, September 17, 2018; Tan (2018d, at 18:00–23:00, 27:57); and Tan (2018a).

CHAPTER TWO. SYNTHETIC REALISM

1 A shorter and earlier version of this chapter was written for, and appears in, Ute Mehta Bauer's edited volume *Climates, Habitats, Environments* (2022), celebrating five years of exhibitions she has curated at the Nanyang Technical University of Singapore's Center for Contemporary Art.

2 I think especially of Ionat Zurr and Oren Catts's installations and artworks using tissue engineering both to demystify the technology and to teach us that even the simplest living matter requires a whole ecology of care, in partial criticism of the "engineering mindset"; also Tal Danino's *Supernova* (2010), which hangs in the entry of MIT's Koch Institute for Cancer Research, an over-

sized series of images showing the explosive expansion of *E. coli* bacteria in cells to illustrate a cancer drug delivery system. For an overview, see Ginsberg et al., *Synthetic Aesthetics* (2017).

3 A striking example is the local theater collective Zeugma's production of *_T0701_* for the 2021 Singapore International Arts Festival, which integrated a game environment with theater to demonstrate both abstractly and substantively how life is increasingly being gamified, especially in the gig economy, but with mutations of power getting everyone to run in an ever speeded-up rat race to nowhere. Four actors were filmed live on a minimal stage (during the COVID-19 pandemic); these films are integrated with avatars and animation on a screen above the stage. Electric music pumps up the adrenaline as the avatar of the main DePers (delivery personnel on motorbikes, also presumably deperson, or nonperson) races on an endlessly scrolling road through abstract urban environments, or, at higher levels of the game and payment scheme, dodges abstract fires and wailing monsters. Even resistance, in the form of Malay magic—*_T0701_* is pronounced "toyol," the name for the ghosts of dead children used by Malay *bomoh*, or shamans (or *guǐ zai* in Cantonese, *kwee kia* in Hokkien) —is subject to partial commodification. The *bomoh*, Cik Rabz, sells contraptions infused with laser-powered spirits, with free, but constant, upgrades, to block the MegahCorp surveillance systems. Black mirror versus black magic, as one wit put it, mirroring one another also in their cult structures. But these *toyol* are eventually hacked and turned against her. Simple in its basic plotline but complex in implementation, the production comes with an app, which the theater audience, video-on-demand viewers, and gamers all can access at will to find the backstories of the characters and check out the animation worlds for each character. After the (COVID-19) virus, says the *bomoh*, Cik Rabz, miming many climate-warming activists, we must return to our roots, our old ways of living. "The giant will fall to the hands of the termites." But the story line provides little hope for the old magic, and it ends with a beautiful rendition of a *ghazal* "*Langit Tinggi Rendah*" (Sky high low) that begins:

Lidah terptong
Jatuh ke lantai
Langit dijunjung
Jinjit tak tersampai. . . . Bermesra dulu
Berbisu kemudian. . . . Harga diri ditelan

Chop off the tongue
Let it fall to the ground
Carry the sky above our head
Tiptoe out of reach. . . . First, we make merry
Then we become mute. . . . Our worth, we swallow

It ends, "*Kilat nya seri / Guruhnva mana?*" [The lightning is illuminating / But where is thunder?].

4 Mi You (2018, 229) suggests thinking about the ten thousand tigers in terms of Deleuze and Guattari's ten thousand plateaus, as different moments of historical time: the fourteenth-century legendary misrecognition of a tiger as a lion in naming Singapore; the famous 1835 engraving of a tiger attacking the theodolite of a colonial surveyor; Japanese General Tomoyuki Yamashita, the Tiger of Malaysia, in World War II; Lai Teck, the triple agent with numerous aliases (secretary-general of the Communist Party of Malaya and the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army), who was likened to a tiger; the four Asian tigers (Singapore, South Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan) of rapid-growth economies from the 1960s to the 1990s; but also of philosophical motifs that men treat unknown others as tigers treat prey, that enemy soldiers are werewolves who have shed their mask of humanity, and thus the trope of weretigers. Ten thousand is also a traditional Chinese number for a great magnitude or multiplicity. In Taoism, the Way or Dao is called the ten thousand things, meaning both the distractions of daily life and the logic of differentiation (from cosmic unity comes the opposites of ying and yang, light and dark, positive and negative; from dualities come thirds, and so on to all the (unknowable) diversities and mysteries of the cosmos.

5 I take durational time in this context from Henri Bergson by way of Bliss Cua Lim's (2009) analysis of the fantastic as a morphed mode of non-Western time and Crystal Mun-hye Baik's (2019) use of the term for the *longue durée* of the Korean War extending into the present.

6 "Techno-mystic" is from Weerasethakul's "The Anthem" in the program notes for which he identifies "YouTube as Spirit Medium," designed as a ritual to be played before cinema showings: "I would like to propose a Cinema Anthem that praises and blesses the approaching feature for each screening. An older lady will perform a ritual channeling energy to the audience to give them a clear mind. The ritual will ensure that after the feature film ends, life and the outside world will be better."

7 Thai temples with outdoor sculpture gardens of hell are relatively new, though they draw on (and alter) older iconography from paintings and murals. Sala Kaew Kuu, constructed by a nonordained man who became a kind of guru figure, was begun in 1978 after an earlier temple across the river was destroyed by the Laotian government; near Chiang Rai, the Rong Wat Khun, or White Palace, was built between 1997 and 2008 by artist Chalermchai Kositpipat; outside Bangkok, the Wang Saen Suk Hell Garden was begun in 1986; and in Chiang Mai, Wat Mae Kaet Noi was begun in 2015 by Pra Ku Vishanjalikon. Older and more sedate, but with the same pedagogical purpose, are the Haw Paw Villa in Singapore (1937) and the Tiger Balm Garden in Hong Kong (1935) and a never-finished third one in Fujian Province (abandoned with the communist takeover in 1949). Their forms differ but generally draw on the

cosmography of nine rings of caverns (*naraka*) below the human world (*jambudvipa*) with starving ghosts, or *preta*, on their purgatorial edges who can sometimes emerge into human worlds.

8 There are two fabulous paintings of *kamaitachi* as or on whirlwinds reproduced on Wikipedia, which also points out that there are variant forms of the figure in many parts of Japan. Wikipedia, s.v. Kamaitachi, last edited September 22, 2021, at 23:42 UTC, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kamaitachi.

9 Hijikata is a fascinating and complex figure whose films and dance cannot be fully explored here. For two very different accounts and appreciations, see Barber (2010, 2019) and Vangeline (2021). In some respects, Vangeline's efforts to explore Hijikata's and his successors' body-mind practices in conjunction with growing understandings of neuroscience are closer to Choy's experiments with electrical mapping. Vangeline describes a highly disciplined teaching-learning practice that pays attention to isolation of the muscles, to triggers of emotion within the neurological system and musculature, and to differences between what can be seen on the surface of the body and what is being triggered below the skin. Stephen Barber, by contrast, focusing on Hijikata's experimental films with a series of collaborators in the 1960s, provides a rich portrait of the transgressive, experimental arts scene in the post–World War II period that dealt with death, sacrifice, perversion, and betrayal, drawing on Jean Genet and many others in a city that was being reconstructed from ashes into a modern and postmodern city.

10 Elagabalus comes from the Arabic *Illah ha-Gabal* (*illah* "god" + *gabal* "mountain"). He was a high priest of this form of Ba'al (Lord) in Emesa (modern Homs) in Roman Syria.

11 On Stelarc, whom I met in Singapore at the Art/Science Museum, see Fischer (2009). There is, of course, a large literature on Stelarc.

12 October 3–5, 1973, Nippon Seinenkan Hall, Tokyo. See photos at https://ko-murobushi.com/eng/works/view/9.

13 The survey and incident with the tiger took place in 1835. Heinrich Leuchtman's engraving and print from his earlier drawing are dated 1865. The surveyor was George Drumgoole (or Drumgold) Coleman, who was not only surveyor and city planner but superintendent of prisons, since public works were done with prisoner-convict labor.

14 In a 2022 work, "Language," created for augmented reality that can only be seen through phone cameras, one hears the texts of three different philosophers from the Kyoto school, one of whom, Hajime Tanabe, was very nationalistic and tells students that to die for the country is sublime, and two others, more left wing, who opposed him: Kitaro Nishida, who wanted to create a dialogue between Asian and Western philosophy and formulated a concept of "absolute nothingness"; and his disciple, Miki Kioshi, who was imprisoned for harboring a communist, and died there in 1945 (Ho 2022c, 2022f). "Lan-

guage" emerges from earlier works by Ho: *The Kyoto School* (2018) and *Hotel Aporia* (2019). Ho explores in these works the difference between 3D anime (in which you can manipulate the virtual space around an object) and 2D anime (in which you have to draw new frames to show different angles). "Language" was created for the Singapore "Light to Night Festival" (2022b). Ho acknowledges being influenced in these works on history and war in Asia by his friend and fellow artist Park Chan-kyong.

15 The original *CDOSEA* was arranged by the twenty-six letters of the English alphabet. In the more dynamic versions, across the bottom one can skip around by selecting a letter of the alphabet, or one can let the film compose randomly (or by its algorithm); one can choose a language for the subtitles (text); and there are ten different voice-overs (sound). Ho built a team of assistants and collaborators and gave them a three-hour orientation lecture on the twenty-six letters but then let them collect videos and notes as they liked ("going into the field, onto the internet" (Ho 2022c) so that he, Ho, is not responsible for content selection, only for setting some parameters. Footage was collected from many online sources (including YouTube, Vimeo, and movies downloaded with BitTorrent) and fed into an OXDB algorithmic composition software program developed with two software engineers in Berlin. "The whole work was built through parameters rather than specific decisions, my own role was to produce the parameters" (Ho 2022c).

16 He acknowledges that dictionaries (his original concept for the *CDOSEA*) are also updated by teams of collaborators and are thus not quite fixed or dead. But they are in slow motion in comparison to his more evolved concept for the *CDOSEA* as a metaproject that is itself dynamic and self-transforming, generating new spin-off projects.

17 The adaptation of *One or Several Tigers* for the National Gallery Singapore, is set within a mirrored box that draws visitors into the box with reflections of themselves and parts of the City Hall Chamber, where they encounter the tiger and the surveyor. This version is described as having "shadow puppets, LED lights, smoke machine, show control system, and video (2-channel, 10-channel sound, 16:9 format, color)" (Ho 2018). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0J9JEAMfYHE.

18 *Park Chan-Kyong—Gathering*, pamphlet, MMCA Hyundai Motor Series 2019, October 26, 2019–February 23, 2020, 4.

19 For more on *min-jung* art, its origins following the 1980 Gwangju Uprising against military dictatorship and massacre, earlier influences dating back to 1969, democratic claims, its middle-class social base, and changes over time, as well as its problematic ethnocentrism constructed around such terms as *min-jung* and *han* (grievance, resentment, unsatisfied desire), see Hoffmann (1997). Park's thoughts about his relation to *min-jung* art in this film are briefly discussed in Armin (2011).

20 *Sindoan* (Park 2008; six-channel video, 45 minutes) leads viewers to the village of that name in the mountains that has been a refuge for a variety of religious movements (Park claims some eighty of them between 1924 and 1975), including Cheondogyo, which grew out of the Donghak movement and the Donghak Peasant Revolution of 1894, which in turn helped trigger the first Sino-Japanese War. *Way to the Seung-ga Temple* (Park 2017b) shows the items abandoned by pilgrims to the temple and lays them to rest with a shamanistic farewell ritual. *Citizen's Forest* (Park 2016) is a nightmarish black-comedy three-channel projection that plays with the idea that transcendence in Western art is vertical, while the *shan-shui* (mountain-water) art of Eastern landscape scrolls is done horizontally in ways that have you look from multiple points along the way (hence three channels). Park says of *Citizen's Forest* that he was searching for a way to mourn the *Sewol* ferry, and while drawing aesthetically on Oh Yoon's *Won Gi Do* (1980s mural) and poet Kim Soo Young's *Colossal Root*, the most essential form he borrowed was from the Korean shaman ritual *gut*. At the end of the *gut* ritual, there is a particular tune the shaman uses to invite the spirits as he or she serves them food and then sends them back. The spirits Oh Yoon depicts on his scroll or mural are victims of the Donghak Peasant Rebellion or Gwangju Uprising, who met unjust deaths, not unlike the innocents aboard the *Sewol* ferry. *Kyoto School* (Park 2017a) takes on the journals of kamikaze pilots who died in the attack on Pearl Harbor and uses 320 slides on two projectors, one showing the Kegon Falls, the other the extracts from the journals. Kegon Falls is famous as a site for suicides, but on November 26, 1941, just eleven days before the attack, it was also the site of a meeting of Kyoto philosophers on "The Standpoint of World History and Imperial Japan," proposing Kegon as the symbol of world history, and Japan as a suicidal rock, throwing itself into the waterfall and looking forward to the confrontation between the water's flow and itself.

21 Kim won the 2019 Korea Artist Prize, sponsored by the MMCA and the Seoul Broadcasting System (SBS) Foundation, along with three others: Hyesoo Park, Jewyo Rhii, and Young in Hong (from Hong Kong).

22 Mongolia exports coal, copper, and gold and also has uranium and molybdenum deposits; brass is an alloy of gold and copper. Technically it is Inner Mongolia (China) that produces 95 percent of the globe's "rare earths," mined and processed in the Bayan Obo mines, north of Boatou city (now with a population of 2.5 million). *Rare earths* is something of a misnomer as neodymium and cerium are not actually rare in the earth's crust, but they are highly toxic to extract from ore and refine (Klinger 2017; see also photos accompanying Maughan 2015). Klinger describes the deposits of rare earths at Sao Gabriel de Cachoeira in Brazil's northwestern Amazon and at Bayan Obo as situated "along accretionary *orogenic* belts between major intracontinental cratons" and formed during repeated cycles of small degrees of partial heating and

cooling within the earth's mantle, producing alkaline magmas that, when they ascend and cool in the earth's crust, "undergo further changes stimulated by local temperature, pressure and chemical variations" (2017, 27).

23 There are at least two major Eej Khad, one 70 miles south of Ulaanbataar on the slope of the Avdar Bayan Uul mountain, the other at Sainshand, some 287 miles to the southeast. The former is wrapped in cloth, and the latter has a womb-cave hole through which people can squeeze themselves as in rebirth. Sainshand once was a storied site of many monasteries and a center of Red Hat Tibetan Buddhism (Nyingma), and it continues to carry the title of Energy Center. The monasteries were destroyed, and only two have been restored. The Züünbayan oil field forms one of the communes (*bag*) of Sainshand. It was discovered by Mongolian geologist J. Dugersuren and Soviet geologist Yu. S. Zhelubovsky in 1940; a refinery was built and supplied some 20 percent of Mongolia's fuel and lubricants until a fire destroyed the refinery in 1969, and giant oil fields in western Siberia made it redundant.

24 In Korean the game is called *baemgwa sadali*; in Chinese *she yu tizi*. It is originally from India: the Jain version is called *jnan chauper*, or game of wisdom; the Hindu version is *moksha-patamu*. *Patamu* is the "solution" to getting to liberation (*moksha*) as opposed to merely destiny (*karma*) or desire (*kama*).

25 This segment is viewable on a trailer at http://pierre-pierre.com/work/porosity-valley-portables-holes-ayoung-kim.

26 "Ayoung Kim," Korea Artist Prize, http://koreaartistprize.org/en/project/ayoung-kim/?ckattempt=1.

27 *Porosity Valley 1* was primarily concerned with migration to Australia, where Kim had a residency, at a time when Australia was putting Afghan refugees and others in a camp on Manus Island; and the migration of tectonic plates, through which Australia as a whole annually moves eight centimeters northward. In *Porosity Valley 2*, there are references to Australia, but attention shifts to Yemeni refugees on Jeju Island and to the Mother Rocks of Mongolia. She also connects the latter with her earlier visit to Iran and her learning about Mithra and Mithraism's dispersion across the Roman Empire and Central Asia as far as today's Mongolia and China.

28 I'm indebted to the anthropologist Manduhai Buyandelger for this, and to Jessica Madison for observations on the Sainshand Mother Rock womb.

29 Again, on the shocks of the collapse of communism, of communal pastoral production, and the sudden introduction of capitalism to pastoralists without the ability to navigate the new conditions, many of whom became miners, see Buyandelger (2013).

30 For example, her Paris dance and music piece on the bitumen that covered the flooding basement of the Palais Garnier; and her 2015 *Zepeth, Whale Oil from the Hanging Gardens to You, Shell 2* (January 30–31, 2015, with music by Heera Kim, a play with a choir, 50 minutes).

31 See my accounts of the artists' residencies at the STPI (Singapore Tyler Print Institute), where there is training on paper and printmaking for established artists who have not worked with this medium, and Donald Saff's Graphicstudio (Fischer 2018a, 22–27). Included in the former is an account of the work of Korean artist Do Ho Suh and Filipino artists Robert Ventura and Geraldine Javier. Indonesian artist Entang Wiharso also has had a residency there.

CHAPTER THREE. FEMINAGE, *WARANG*, AND THE NERVOUS SYSTEM (HAUNTOLOGY AND CURATION)

1 See M.-J. Good and B. Good (2008). And, among the catalogs, see especially Christine E. Cocca's overview of shifts in Wiharso's themes and practices in her preface to *Trilogy* (Wiharso 2014). See also Suwarno Wisetrotomo's "Signa in Entang Wiharso's Works" in the catalog *Crush Me: Double Sided* (Wiharso 2013).

2 Panels on the Southeast Asian art markets were part of the 2016 Singapore ArtStage events. The one on Indonesia was moderated by Tan Siuli, the curator for Indonesia at the new (2016) Singapore National Galley of Southeast Asian Art. The three panelists were a gallery owner, an arts journalist, and an auctioneer: Gajah Gallery owner Jasdeep (Justin) Sandhu (who showed Entang Wiharso's work *Illusion, Myth, and Reality* in 1997), auctioneer Daniel Komala (who auctioned the first Indonesian piece that went for US$1 million), and art journalist Carla Bianpoen, who was with Wiharso at the fifty-fifth Venice Biennale (2013). An interesting overview from the auction perspective is given by Kartini Ayuningtyas Putri (2012). She flags the April and May 2007 auctions at Sotheby's and Christie's as turning points in the auction markets for Indonesian contemporary art. In 2010 eleven Indonesian artists were among the five hundred highest-selling artists at auctions. Putri has little to say about the role of museum acquisitions or art shows.

3 Wayang was also used "from the right" by President Suharto to rally people for elections and to support his New Order (Andelman 1977). *Ludruk* plays, based in kampong life of East Java, operated similarly as a space of commentary and rites of modernization (Peacock 1968). More contemporary wayang renditions by Purbo Asmoro are available on YouTube and in English texts translated by Katherine Emerson (*Rama's Crown* and *The Grand Offering of Kings*, both published in Jakarta by the Lontar Foundation in 2013). Jan Mrazek's *Wayang and Its Doubles* (2019) does for wayang in the context of television in 1995–2005 what Peacock does for *ludruk* in the early 1960s.

4 The term *feminage* was coined by Miriam Shapiro and Melissa Meyer and has been taken up by a number of feminist artists, including prominently by Sally Smart. See the exhibition *Femmage Shadows and Symptoms*, Robert Lindsay Gallery, Melbourne, Australia, 1997; and the twelve-woman show *Feminage:*

The Logic of Feminist Collage, Sydney, August 2–September 15, 2012, http://crossart.com.au/exhibition-archive/99-2012-exhibitions-projects/169-feminage-the-logic-of-feminist-collage.

5 Where not otherwise indicated, all quotes are from author interviews with the artist.

6 The attack was claimed by the Islamic State through its Aamaq news agency and by Katibah Nusantara, an Indonesian group with allegiance to the Islamic State that has fighters in Syria. Jakarta's police chief, Tito Karnavian, named Bahrun Naim, believed to be in Syria, as the mastermind and said nine Islamic State suspects had been arrested in December with plans to "do a concert" in Jakarta. The Jakarta attack began, as did the more expansive one in Paris, with a suicide bomber walking into a café or bistro and combining suicide bombing, hostage taking, and shooting.

7 In Islam, as in other monotheistic traditions, there is no proscription against images, although all have had aniconic periods and movements. Theologically the proscription is against *worship* of any but God. As the miniature traditions of Islamic art demonstrate, among both Sunnis and Shias, there is no general prohibition of figuration.

8 Institut Seni Indonesia Yogyakarta (ISI Yogyakarta) now has some two thousand students in all fields of the arts. Refounded in 1984, it is a successor to earlier art, dance, and music institutes founded in the 1950s and 1960s, and along with the Institute of Indonesian Arts and Culture in Bandung (Institut Seni Budaya Indonesia [ISBI] Bandung), it is one of the leading arts schools in Indonesia. Wiharso says he and his cohort were reacting against earlier hegemonic styles taught in the school such as the romantic *"Beautiful Indies" (Mooi Indie)* genre or more generally art produced according to what dealers thought the art market would like.

9 The theme of the Greek myth of the original human split into male and female halves, so we are always in search of the other, is made explicit in Maria Tumarkin's poem accompanying Smart's Pedagogical Puppet video (see below).

10 The *gunungan* (literally "mountain, Mount Meru") is used to open and close a wayang shadow play and at various points to signal emotion. It is often intricately designed with two giant guardians by a closed gate and a tree above, dividing a tiger or lion on one side and a bull on the other, and has a checker or chessboard entryway.

11 In notes on the blackboard of the Pedagogical Puppet project, Smart sometimes invokes Paul Eluard's 1929 *The Surrealist Map of the World*, which is centered on Oceania, after his trip to Southeast Asia.

12 Bajau is sometimes pejorative in the Philippines, but it seems to be a structural pair with Sama, roughly meaning "sea oriented" (*bajau*) and "land oriented" (*sama*). This structural dyad in claims of autochthony (seed of the soil) and invaders (often establishing new political sovereignties) is a pattern

from Fiji and Hawaii to Sri Lanka and Greece. Sama is often a preferred self-designation, particularly in Malaysia, where it is accorded Bumiputra status, and in the Philippines, where fishing Bajau are poor, while settled Sama are wealthier.

13 *The Exquisite Pirate—South China Sea*, OV Gallery, https://www.ovgallery.org/exhibition/the-exquisite-pirate-%e2%80%93-south-china-sea/.

14 At another point Wiharso says the question of conflict and boundaries in *Paradise* and *Paradise Lost* came from the experience of having his house robbed and his reflections on the longer-term causes beyond the proximate ones (January 14, 2016, 22:40).

15 It's like a self-portrait of the artist's head, with wires coming out of the severed head, titled *Don't Touch Me* (2004).

16 The iconography here is somewhat different: a five-eyed Batman faces the front of the bus, which is being driven by a grinning four-eyed figure, a buxom girl next to him. The Batman in front has a long erection-like tubing attached to his head, allowing flames to replace his tongue. In his right hand he holds a sword touching the shoulder of a nude sexy model in sunglasses, seated by a table, at which a much smaller figure of a man is also seated, and on which a pot of soup steams or perhaps flames. A second, headless female kneels in front, attached to an orgy of other figures, with at the end the bent rifle reaching up to the door of the bus. Out of the door of the bus, a melted figure emerges, with a long right arm touching the tongue of a Batman in a cape and holding a kris that is about to puncture the bus's tire. Below the melted figure is another spot-covered metal man who holds onto the barrel of the rifle. In the catalog this bus is paired with three of Smart's ships.

17 *Sákti* was the theme of the Indonesian Pavilion, and the curatorial statement says, "In Sanskrit, *sákti* refers to primordial cosmic energy and the personification of divine, feminine creative energy; it also indicates change and liberation. Of Indian origin, the Hindu concept of *sákti* was quickly integrated by Indonesians into their local cosmology, becoming associated with such mythical female figures as the rice goddess Dewi Sri and the South Sea Queen, and with certain objects like the *keris* (ritual dagger)."

18 There is a variant image purchased by the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, in synthetic polymer, paint and foil on canvas with collage elements, accession number 2009.134 in the Contemporary Art Department. In this case the black bird sits on the flag pole with red and black flags, hand jauntily on right hip, and bare breasted. Another image is of a black-skirted, peg-legged, dagger-holding, and tri-cornered hat, with the bird on right shoulder, and left arm holding a painting of a bare-breasted woman. The website has an excellent selection of thirty-three other images of choreography, Dada dolls, ships, and other variants of the ones in *Conversation: Endless Acts in Human History*. http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/explore/collection/work/89783/.

19 The nice story about taking her young son to see a *Treasure Island* film takes on a sharper tone in Smart's acknowledgment of Kathy Acker's *Pussy, King of the Pirates* (1996), a transgressive cut-up of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, as an important influence. Smart saw Acker do a reading of *Pussy, King of the Pirates* in Melbourne in 1995. http://www.ovgallery.com/artist/sally-smart/sally-smart-the-exquisite-pirate-melissa-miles/.

20 The Norwegian freighter *MV Tampa* rescued 438 refugees, mainly Hazaras from Afghanistan, from a sinking fishing boat and attempted to take them to Australia but was denied permission by the Australian authorities; the refugees were diverted to Nauru.

21 Aside from Wiharso 2015c, the same website shows other work he did at STPI. For a deeper view of his explorations at STPI, see also Wiharso 2015b, 2022a, 2022b. These explorations with paper, yarn, and paint cover a wide range of his work.

22 "The idea of an Indonesian diaspora is still a new and unfamiliar concept for Indonesians and I think this is because of our colonial history. A resistance toward something foreign still exists even though the Netherlands no longer holds any power here. The landscape of regulations and laws that were adopted during colonial rule to protect Dutch wealth and their interests still exists in Indonesia, but affects people today in unexpected, unsettling and problematic ways. This condition has led to a lot of questions about the Indonesian diaspora in my work, especially since the birth of my two children" (Wiharso 2014, 226).

23 For a sense of the variations of both this and her various projects, see her website, especially the sections on Projects, and on Prototypes and Multiples. (Smart n.d. a, n.d. b). Last accessed July 21, 2022.

24 All were multitalented constructivist and Dada artists, working in textiles and photomontage, as well as other media, including dancing, especially with Rudolf Laban's geometric dance notation. Particularly resonant with Smart's *Politics of Cutting* projects is Dada artist Höch's large-scale photomontage *Cut with the Dada Kitchen Knife through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch in Germany* (1919).

25 The full poem can be found in the catalog *The Pedagogical Puppet* (Smart 2016).

26 In the catalog version (Smart 2016, 52), and in New York, it is about dancing: "In being dancing, she was dancing she was remembering having been dancing / She was believing in thinking in meaning / being existing. She was being one / Going to be moving in any direction. She was being one being one who had not been dancing / She was being one leading and following every / being in one direction. She was being one being one dancing."

27 In the light of Wiharso's later works described in the appendix, I might suggest these dogs are the Indonesian wild dogs or hyenas, Suharto's dogs, or also the dogs of mob animalism.

28 Wiharso makes the same point in an email to Melissa Chu from February 24, 2015, printed in the catalog for *Never Say No* (Wiharso 2015, 4), about a different artwork that is about "how consciously or unconsciously, one can feel insecure living in Indonesia with the issue of racism—since the history of colonialization is still strongly present."

29 A wonderful variant in the catalog, titled *Reclaim Paradise* (Wiharso 2014–15), has a woman in a red dress arching her back over his head as well as an R2-D2–style robot, instead of meditation smoke, at the top of his head. The robot has multiple attachments, one of which pours liquid into the man's forehead. The woman has multiple arms, rotating clockwise like a *su* (good) *asti* (being) *ka*, or multiarmed Hindu goddess. There are actually only three arms and hands, one of which is a right leg, but the two left legs complete a five-point circuit. The robot has eleven visible attachments (pipes and tubes), one plugged into another nearby robot with its own waving multiple connectors, at least three of which are available for more connections. Seven humanoid silvered figures surround the main figure, and a pink lotus blossom is open at the bottom. A silvered goat is on the main figure's shoulder, a reference to Wiharso's self-icon, the black goat (Wiharso 2014–15, 48).

30 In this piece the Dutch woman lace maker is replaced by a young seated woman with long hair to whom a double-sided skeleton stepping out of his skin says, "I will attack your heart with my raft tongue." In the upper left corner, another woman is slumped over a table with her index finger up in the air, while her male companion says, "Focus."

CHAPTER FOUR. NOMADIC VIDEO IN TURBULENT SEA STATES

1 The phrase "partitioning of the sensible" is from Rancière (2000, English translation 2004).

2 There are numerous videos and stills of Lim's work on the Internet that the reader can easily access. The most comprehensive collections are his Flickr account (Lim 2005–present), his website (Lim 2022–present), his catalog for the Venice Biennale (2015b), and his catalog for his retrospective at the Nanyang Technical University Center for Contemporary Art (2016b). A quick overview is his eleven-minute medley video (Lim 2016c). There are many Vimeo and YouTube video clips, often outtakes or work in progress; some become part of exhibited works, but others are interesting outtakes. For instance, for *all lines flow out*, there is a clip of a man emerging from the sea and struggling up the beach, and two others of test flares making a beautiful, hellish scene. What gets shown under the name of each of the *SEA STATES* varies, as is the case with many artists' works that evolve over time, with different individual pieces shuffled. Artists' statements also often repeat verbatim or with slight variation in many different interviews or texts. As with other essays in

this volume, unless otherwise indicated, quotations are from my interviews with the artist.

3 Lim jokes that at the time "they gave three reasons for why it broke: one, there was an earthquake in the sea, second, a ship's anchor dragged the cable, and third, sharks bit the cable. I found it quite interesting that they were finding *these humorous, ridiculous stories* for why my virtual experience was interrupted" (Lim and Mustafa 2015).

4 Their media art collective was active from 2001 to 2005. Phua is now a scientist in the Defense Sciences Organization, and another member of the collective now works with big-data analysts through the Smart Nation Office under the prime minister. This is a recognition both of complex networks in small societies and of the place of interest in the technological imaginary and infrastructure spanning the arts and planning worlds.

Woon Tien Wei is the founder of the p-10 Post-Museum (2007–11), located in two shophouses in Little India, with exhibit and performance spaces, artists' studios, offices, and cycles of events. Since 2011 it has become nomadic. Julia Gwendolyn Schneider (2007) notes that Woon Tien Wei and his p-10 group of independent curators constituted a new generation that continued the work of the Artists' Village (founded in 1988 by Tang Da Wu). In 1999 they organized a "Post-Ulu" art event, referring to the fact that while they had not experienced Ulu Sembawang (where the Artists' Village began), they were nonetheless continuing the work of creating an alternative arts platform. For the 2006 Singapore Biennale, they organized artworks under a title referring to the national anthem ("A Vision for Tomorrow") as a series of future projects, as Schneider puts it, "to foster national cohesion by presenting site-specific works, whilst on the other hand aiming via their art to draw a clear demarcation line between themselves and Singapore's neoliberal economy."

5 Compare Entang Wiharso's (2017) comment that he wants people "to feel *my visual signals and codes*" more than any particular "reading" and that art dies if there is no audience bringing their own experiences and interpretations. The last comment resonates with Zai Kuning's opening comment about audiences in chapter 5.

6 Project 304 was founded in 1996 by curators Gridthiya Gaweewong and Edouard Mornaud, along with a group of artists and lecturers (Montien Boonma, Kamol Phaosavasdi, Niti Wattuya, Chatchai Puipia, Michael Shoawanasai, Apichatpong Weerasethakul, and Prapon Kumjim), an architect (Sajeetip Nimvijit), and an art director (Teerapole Ngamsinjamrus).

7 In the 2019–20 Singapore Biennale, there was a celebratory exhibition on the history of performance art in Singapore, including its moments of suppression, held at, of all places, the National Archives, in the foyer of its newly opened cinema hall. The exhibit was the work of artist-collector Koh Ngauang

How, whose curated collections of newspaper articles, booklets, and ephemera have now been at least partly acquired by the Singapore Art Museum.

8 Reflecting on training curators, Gridthiya Gaweewong says, "I wish I hadn't studied in Chicago [in 1996 at the Art Institute of Chicago]. It didn't work. Every country is totally different, context-wise. You really need to understand things like the infrastructure, the politics, the policy and the mentality of the philanthropy." She is trying to establish a regional international curatorial practice program at Chulalongkorn University (Crosbie-Jones 2019).

9 "The Venice Biennale, especially for national pavilions, is a very odd situation for artists, happening once in your life, where the state and the artists kind of meet at the same point. . . . It gives you the chance to craft your own way in which the work is presented. Because normally, when you show in places like *documenta* or other international biennales, the curators will have an idea of who you are and kind of just plug you in, like an artist that was put in an ethnological museum. . . . [T]he urge of the curator is to make your representation of your [cultural] situation become even stronger. But as artists, working in our glocal situation, we don't operate like that actually" (Lim, in Lim and Mustafa 2015).

10 This is a function of how it came to be made: from an inflatable boat with two people pulling it smoothly along, Lim shot over a month of footage in the aspect ratio 16:9 with a Canon 5E Mark II but didn't like the results, so found an old anamorphic X-o-rama lens to mount on top and widen the image capture. This capture is usually twice the amount of horizontal information provided by a spherical lens. This squeezing or compression then requires in postproduction unsqueezing or stretching so the image will look natural. Lim then cropped it into 2-3-5, cropped it some more, and then letterboxed it.

11 Although Singapore does not accept humanitarian refugees today (such as the boat people from Afghanistan or Rakhine State trying to make their way to Australia), nearby Batam had an important refugee camp for the Vietnamese boat people in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the remains of which I visited in 2013 and which can still be seen today.

12 On multistable figures, reversals of figure and ground, and temporary autonomous zones, I am indebted to Anselm Franke, who in turn draws on Hakim Bey and Kenna Easterling. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ToHEzpTxpnE.

13 The Singapore Port Authority updates its charts every year and in 2004 the buoy, the island, and Pulau Sejahat Kechil disappeared from the chart. The longer process of land reclamation around them took more than a year; it felt like a process of "cleansing," Lim says, suiting Singapore as a clean city. "When I found the island, it was physically there, but looked like an oasis, an island surrounded by sand; and I walked the island and it didn't feel an evil is-

land to me, it felt like any island, so I wanted *a thing* to understand *the gravitas* of this event" (https://vimeo.com/134796888).

14 The website has a round cassette displaying in richer color than the original wall photographs, and in moving sequence, the paired views of each buoy. The image of the wall display is from the NTU CCA retrospective. At the bottom are some schematics of the wave size for each of the nine sea states.

15 Malaysia banned exports of sand to Singapore in 1997; Indonesia banned exports of sand to Singapore in 2007; Vietnam and Cambodia banned river dredging for export in 2009. Kalyanee Mam's 2019 short film *Lost World*, using some of Lim's aerial video from *SEA STATE 6* and *SEA STATE 9*, says that since 2007 Cambodia has granted several private companies concessions to mine coastal mangrove forests. In it Koh Sralau islander Phalla Vy both shows us the fishers' lives being undermined, and she visits Singapore to see the "land reclamation" for the new Gardens on the Bay. Emily Buder (2019) in a curatorial note for the *Atlantic*'s showcase of short documentaries quotes Mam as struck by "the irony of the situation: Singapore's quest to become one of the greenest cities in the world has led the country to commit what Mam calls 'an ecological massacre.'" Buder's title is "When Your Land Is Stolen from under Your Feet." Myanmar and the Philippines are also sources of sand for Singapore (Milton 2010; Comaroff 2014).

16 Forest City, a so-called eco-city being developed by the sultan of Johor, Ibrahim Eskandar, and Hong Kong's Country Gardens, on four human-made islands in the Straits of Johor, to open in 2035, has already presold 500 of its 700,000 residential units, targeting the affluent Chinese market. To reclaim land, 162 million cubic meters of sand are being used, risking destruction of Malaysia's largest intertidal seagrass meadow (Merambong Shoal), loss of fishing grounds, damage to mangroves, and possible shifts in the current. The joint venture, Garden Country Pacificview, claims to have done twenty simulation studies, reduced the project size by 30 percent, and installed double silt curtains to prevent pollution of the waterway. Acknowledging the negative effects, the project says they are offset by the economic benefits, including 62,000 jobs. Two-bedroom units sell for US$200,000, seaside villas for $1.6 million. Given the downturn in the Chinese economy and measures against flight of money, the project has been downgraded by Standard and Poor's from BB+ to BB (Navaratnarajah 2016).

17 See Lim (2016a) for images of the barnacle-encrusted buoy on its side in the NTU CCA exhibit in 2016, a photo of it upright collecting barnacles in a swampy area, and the navigation charts as it was "disappeared" into a larger land reclamation. It was initially displayed at Manifesta 7 and then in an expanded format at the Venice Biennale 2015 and the NTU CCA the following year.

18 Mounted in the rooftop space of the National Gallery in 2019.

19 Gardens by the Bay, for instance, has displays on climate change to educate the public and especially schoolchildren.

20 Researchers at the Singapore Aquarium, for instance, are involved in helping tag and track manta rays off the coast of Australia, and dolphins in the Irrawaddy, to learn about their travels and patterns. When manta rays and dolphins, and tagged whales, come up to the surface, the collected data are uploaded to a satellite in a kind of reversal of astrophysics arrays looking into space.

21 Apparently, the companies that lay cables shoot a lot of footage of the process, and Lim thinks there must be somewhere "tapes and tapes of very boring footage of the cables being laid. And I find this process very interesting—it's like proof that it's there in a space that is kind of invisible" and reflects back on *tsunami.net* and is something perhaps still to be explored.

22 In one version we end with going back up to the surface in the elevator. Some supplementary clips show a man standing on a board paddling, with Jurong Island's petrochemical complex's tanks and fractioning towers and pipes in the background; another has a sandy beach in the background and shows a street scene of a large road, a pedestrian overpass, a man pushing a baby stroller, another on a scooter passing him, and girls walking along (oblivious to both the sea and what's below the surface) (Lim 2019b).

23 Lim has had many conversations with Foo over the years and formally interviewed him three times.

24 See the wonderful Malay Film Productions (Shaw Brothers) website (undated but posted 2008) with old quarry photographs, cliff faces, geological maps, blackboard idea sessions, and locations for the 1949 film *The Hunter*; and photos of the underground Mandai Quarry Underground Ammunition Facility in 1993 (original quarry), 2000s (building the undeground facility), and 2008 (inside the new facility). The 2008 photograph was taken by Muglan Rajasegaran and is identified as published in the *Straits Times* on March 8, 2008. There is also a story on the underground facility in the *New Paper*, dated March 8, 2008, but it is accessible only from multimedia stations in the Singapore National Library Board (NLB 2008).

CHAPTER FIVE. WATER NOTES ON RATTAN STRINGS

1 The naming practice is that the son takes the father's first name as his surname, so the names alternate across generations (this once was a frequent Jewish tradition as well, until family names were enforced). Zai is well known and usually called and referred to as "Zai" or "Zai Kuning." I will adopt the practice of calling him Zai Kuning or Zai. As in previous chapters, all quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from my interviews with him.

2 Thalassocracies are political forms built usually in estuaries or along coasts

with harbors, where seaborne trade is directed. For a brilliant account of the struggle of Malay *kerajaan*, *negeri*, and sultanates in Sumatra and Malaya, see Omar (1993). *Kerajaan* (from raja, ruler) is the seat of a political leader, a term used in the Malay world. *Negeri* (or *negara*) is a similar term meaning ritual and political center (viz. Geertz 1980 for Bali); *negeri* is the variant used by Omar (1993) for the Malay peninsula and Sumatra. See Tambiah (1977) for Buddhist Southeast Asian galactic polities.

3 A nonprofit arts organization, Emily Hill Enterprise leases the villa from the Singapore Land Authority and rents spaces to some eleven artists as well as for functions (see Facebook for pictures and events: https://www.facebook.com/emilyhillsg/). Said by Singapore heritage blogger Jerome Lim (Lim 2012) and a journalist (Zaccheus 2016) to have been built in the late nineteenth century by Syed Hashim Kassim of Siak (Indonesia), it was bought by a Japanese dentist, Jukichi Ikeda, in 1935 but in 1939 was given over to the Japanese consulate. It sat on the hill above Little Japan at the foot of the hill. After World War II, it became the Ministry of Social Affairs' Social Welfare Department; then, in 1969, Mount Emily Girls' Home; in the 1980s, Wilkie Road Children's Home; then a drug counseling center; and then the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts.

4 In the Venice catalog, Zai says he was eighty-one at the time, in any case in his eighties (Kuning 2017a).

5 Nusantara was originally a term for the maritime edges of the fourteenth-century Majapahit Empire (based in Java); it was used by anticolonial writers in Malaya and Indonesia in the mid-twentieth century, and again became popular in the 1990s as a youth culture term, and in nationalist political Islamic circles (Evers 2016).

6 Zai writes that the second time was in 2006, when the legendary Asnah Kanah and her combo backed up Kuning Sulaiman. Kuning Sulaiman in the 1980s had played in her combo for several years (personal communication by email, March 21, 2013). I cannot so far locate any independent account of Asnah Kanah.

7 Ombak Hitam (2013).

8 Kuning Sulaiman died on November 1, 2016.

9 Jurong and Bukom, the petrochemical industrial heart of Singapore's economy, remain two islands (but were fused from seven and three original ones, respectively), as does Sentosa (an amusement park area and exclusive residential enclave). Singapore has some fifty islands.

10 Locals use *Austronesian*, *Melanesian*, and occasionally *Polynesian* to differentiate them from Malay populations such as in Zai's differentiation of Bugis from Malay below, and also Ariffin Omar's (1993) discussion of the deeply contested notion of "Malay," especially in Sumatra, often used to exclude Batak and Minangkabau. Linguistically, there seem to have been two directions of

migration, one from Central Asia and mainland Southeast Asia (Aslian languages akin to Mon-Khmer), and another from Melanesia via the archipelago (Austro-Melanesian languages, including Bugis). None of the category terms are satisfactory, and they need to be tracked in their historical usages rather than as settled terms. The terms *Austronesian speakers* and *Melanesian cultures*, or *Austro-Melanesian* and sometimes *Polynesian*, are widely used both in the region and by scholars trying to sort out early migration patterns linguistically, genetically, and archaeologically. Melanesian cultures, with a huge variety of languages, especially in New Guinea, seem to be earlier inhabitants of the area from New Guinea to Fiji, with Austronesian speakers spreading out from Taiwan to the Philippines, New Guinea, and Australia and across "near Oceania," and west from Sulawesi (thanks to Bugis and Makassar seafarer-migrants) to Madagascar. There are cosmological and ritual forms that seem to be widespread from New Guinea across Indonesia and up the coasts of Thailand, intersecting with Indian forms spreading from the east (Cham) and perhaps from the west (Java and Sumatra). Obviously, the terminology is contested and fraught, with Melanesian, Polynesian, Micronesian, and Austronesian being colonial terms and thus relatively recent in provenance. *Orang asli* itself is an official term only from the 1960s but arose in the 1950s when the anti-British communist guerrillas sought support and refuge from these groups in the forests. The Malay government divides them into three macro-categories (Samang or Austro-Melanesian speakers, Senoi or Aslian speakers, and proto-Malay), each divided into smaller tribal groups, often defined by recent habitat and mode of production. Only the Mah Meri among the Semang live along the coast, having moved north from southern Johor; the Seletar, who once also were *orang laut* in the Singapore-Malay border area, are categorized by Malaya as proto-Malay.

11 A contemporary account was written by Ma Huan (a first draft circulated in 1416), and later versions added material from the later trips from his own or others' records (Kuo 2014). Zhang He's largest fleet had over three hundred ships carrying 28,000 men, and the treasure ships were four hundred feet long, displacing ten thousand tons. His Muslim ancestry is usually noted, although Feng Chengjun has stressed rather his Buddhist identity and even ordination (a Buddhist monk also accompanied him), perhaps a function of debates over whether to stress a Sinocentric view of trade networks versus a Persian Gulf one over the centuries on both land and sea silk roads (Kuo 2014). Feng, who obtained a Sorbonne degree under Paul Pelliot (an expert on the Dunhuang cave manuscripts), translated Edouard Chavannes's *Memoir Written in the Grand Tang Dynasty by I-Tsing on the Religious Men Who Went in Search of the Law in Western Lands* (1894), a work about nine of the important Chinese travelers, including Zhang Qian, who traveled to central Asia (164–114 BCE); Fa Xian, the Buddhist pilgrim to India (337–422); Wang

Xuance's three expeditions to Tibet and Nepal (646–57); the sea route of Yi Jing from Pan Yu (Canton) by Persian ship via Srivijaya to India (671); the captured solider in the battle of Talas (who returned to Canton in 752); and Zheng He in the early Ming (1371–1433). In 1225, a century before Zheng He's voyages, the *shi bo shi*, or customs superintendent, of Zayton (Quanzhou) published an account of sea routes gleaned from his years of dealing with merchants from across the southern seas from Champa to Jambi and Srivijaya.

12 For a fascinating review and analysis of early modern European maps incorporating Ottoman-Turkish, Arab, and Chinese maps, as well as textual and archaeological information, see Borschberg (2015).

13 In an interview with journalist Bala Starr from the time when Zai was living in Johor and preparing for an Ota Fine Arts show of his sculptures, he repeats, as he often does, that he is Bugis, *not Malay*. "We are Bugis. I'll show you [throws a knife into the wooden platform that is part of *Dapunta Mapping the Melayu*]." He goes on to argue, "Ok. I must explain something to you. I am not a Malay man. I am a Bugis. We come from Makassar [on Sulawesi, Indonesia]. The Bugis are warlords from Makassar. They were warriors. Thousands of them came to Johor because the Johor Empire had no army . . . to defend Johor in colonial times and became the power behind the Johor Sultanate. . . . The royal house of Riau were descended from Bugis warriors who came to the region in the eighteenth century." Raja Ali Haji (born in 1808 or 1809 in either Selangor or Penyengat off Bintan Island) became sultan of Riau. In this telling, Raja Ali Haji was the leader to tell the Bugis to take up the pen (and printing press) instead of the sword and tried to unify the Malay world through standardizing the language. The interview, apparently from 2013, was posted as an explanatory wall panel at a 2017 show at the Museum of the National University of Singapore (Kuning [2013a]). The island of Penyengat has a number of royal tombs.

14 "The Bugis people are, we are warlords. Warriors. And very grumpy. [*Throws knife.*] The Malay people are different. The Bugis people also capture the Malay world. They are also assholes. They are not nice people. But they come to this area to serve the Johor Empire. Few thousand of them with big ships, and they are good like that, very good. I was trained from young to throw a knife. But we cannot kill people. Not any more, since the time of Raja Ali Haji. He said, 'Throw away your knife, take a pen and write'" (Kuning 2013a, Exhibit wall poster 2016).

15 *We Are Home and Everywhere* is also the title of the edition (I assume either from the Institute for Contemporary Art show or the Esplanade show) now in the permanent collection of the Singapore Art Museum. For an excellent tracing of how the rattan ship evolved through Zai Kuning's various iterations, from strings attached to a stick and ribs hanging from the ceiling, attached at their other ends to the books of knowledge on the polished steel sea, see Saba-

pathy (2017), especially the photos on pp. 201–5 and 208–24. The photo on pp. 204–5 is from the other end of the installation shown in plate 30; those on pp. 201 and 202 are variants on the ritual shown in plate 31; and plate 32 is one of a set of variants on the horse-boat (rib) theme and also a justice theme (p. 213 in the Sabapathy article). The various images taken together constitute both a vivid documentation of how an installation evolves over many exhibits and a reminder of the calligraphic power of strings and sticks, as well as line drawings.

16 He is actually quite scathing about the way in which Singapore's first prime minister, Lee Kuan Yew, used both Parameswara's and Stamford Raffles's names as ideological tokens in campaigns of modernization, devasting to simpler ways of life or the *orang laut* but also to those of his own childhood: "Who discriminates against this [earlier world of Dapunta Hyang]? It's the attitudes of LKY [Lee Kuan Yew]. He even used Parameswara as a word, as a token, and then he used Raffles as the [hero of our] modern history. When Raffles came to Singapore in the eighteenth century, Singapore already had a big port and LKY destroyed it, and then he destroyed the rest of Malay history. That is my anger" (Kuning 2013a, Exhibit Wall Poster 2016). In this same interview with Starr, he speaks of wanting to move to a coastal town, Muar, near Malacca, where he might find a wooden house next to the sea, where he could enjoy just jumping into the sea or picking fruits whenever he liked.

17 In 2011 he wrote a book manuscript about the *orang laut* way of life that was blocked from publication. He had interest from the museums and was talking with the Malay Heritage Center about publishing it. He surmises that because in a way he was asserting that there are Malays who do not want to be Muslim, the Malay Heritage Center felt it could not sponsor the book, and they were too embarrassed to say so explicitly. The project languished for lack of funds (interview with the author, 2017).

18 *Galactic polities* is a term coined by the anthropologist Stanley Tambiah for South and Southeast Asian Hindu and Buddhist polities (before the great transition into mass politics of the nation-state era). He was thinking more of land-based theater or *negara* states, but his account of foreign princes arriving from abroad to violently conquer and domesticate islands like Sri Lanka fits a maritime and archipelago pattern from Fiji to Greece explored by the anthropologist Marshall Sahlins with the skeptical, yet interested, support of classicists (Tambiah 1977, 1986; Omar 1993; Sahlins 2004; Fischer 2013b).

19 A much older archaeological history of Southeast Asian trade networks is slowly being pieced together, for example, the excavation of Khao Sam Kaeo, a coastal port city from the fourth to the second or first century on the China–South India maritime silk road (Bellina 2017).

20 A historical plaque in the Kampong Glam Malay Heritage Garden in Singapore, a medicinal garden, says explicitly that the Malay are "part of Austro-

Polynesian peoples who populate SE Asia and west as far as Madagascar; historically settled on coasts, along rivers or forests where they were able to seek 'succor, shelter and medicines.'"

21 The seventeenth-century *Hikayat Banjar* is another such Malay manuscript, from the thalassocratic port Banjarmassim, in southern Kalimantan (Borneo), and there is one for Acheh as well. The *Hikayat Banjar* is astutely analyzed by Michael Dove (2011, ch. 2) in terms of competition over the pepper trade, which European demand forced to become an export crop (rather than just a supplement to subsistence farming among Dayaks), and this in part was a source of the movement of the port to avoid control by the Dutch (also perhaps because of silting). Dove analyzes the upriver–downriver relations of the "Malays" of the coast vis-à-vis the more inland Dayak and, further yet inland, the Penan. As indicated in footnote 15 the port had earlier been sited at Tanjung Pura, Nagara Daha, and Matarpura. And the migration patterns across the seas are still unclear, with Austronesian Malagasy in the earlier period as well, who left perhaps owing to a Buddhist invasion from Java in the sixth to seventh centuries. Dove notes the fourth-century Sanskrit and Pallava inscriptions in Kalimantan and reports that, both today and in the *Hikayat Banjar*, people speak of their ancestors as coming originally from Kalinga (east-central India), but that there was a kingdom of the same name in Java in the seventh century and that much later traders from the Coromandel Coast (South India) were called Keling (p. x). In the *Hikayat Banjar*, it is said that despite origins in India, the proper dress code should follow the Javanese, where they previously had made their home before Borneo. But other scholars have suggested that there is a confusion between the ethnonym Kalinga and the Indonesian term *kalin*, meaning "foreigner" in general (see the review of the debate in Adelaar 2017, 460–62).

22 The theater community will never let the Singapore state under Lee Kuan Yew forget the four-year, seven-month imprisonment without trial of Kuo Pao Kun. He was released from prison in 1980 and went on to become Singapore's most celebrated theater practitioner and trainer of a younger generation, writing plays in both Mandarin and English.

23 See Kuning (2011) for the video of a performance monologue Zai gave to save the garden.

24 His films are *Ozer001* (1993), *Music Space* (1996), *Bluemonkish* (1996), *String in the Ocean* (2000), *Even Dogs Have Choices* (2003), *Riau* (2005), and *Birdy* (2005). The most provocative was *Even Dogs Have Choices*, set in a tattoo parlor. The protagonist, pop star X'Ho (Chris Ho), decides he still has some space on his penis. The censors wanted this cut, Zai refused, and the film was banned.

25 See the description of the three stories, and the larger festival program (Kuning 2010) (last accessed July 28, 2022). The performance took place in the

open area in front of the Singapore Management University. The Festival "New World" was organized by TheatreWorks.

26 Kelantan's PAS (Parti Islam Se Malaysia, or Islamic Party of Malaysia) government banned it because the elements of fantasy and pre-Islamic beliefs make it "unsuitable for a Muslim audience." "It is only for foreign tourists and for those conducting research, not for local residents or local Muslims," Kelantan State Culture Committee chairman Datuk Anuar Tan Abdullah told the journalist Ian Mcintyre (2007). The PAS ruled in Kelantan first for two decades (1959–77) and again for three decades since 1990.

27 The variations of this legend are summarized in the Wikipedia entry, with the addition of a further claim of descent from Z-ul-Qarnayn (ذوالقرنين *dū al-qarnayn*), known in the West as Alexander the Great and in the Qur'an (sureh 18, al-qaf, The Cave) by his title "two horned" (ruler of East and West, or ruler of this world and after the Day of Judgment, and, in the Qur'an, he whom God asks to build a wall against Gog and Magog). Two-horned might also come from the ram-god (Zeus-Amon). Gog and Magog are thought to be either the Scythians, against whom the Sassanians built a wall, or the Chinese, who built their own great wall. The sword of Alexander is said to have passed down to become part of the regalia of the Perak sultanate. It is named *Cura* (Skt "sword, dagger," contemporary Malay or Indonesian *kris*) *Si Manjakini* (Sanskrit *mantra* + *dakini*). Dakini is a tantric spirit in Vajrayana Buddhism. Zai Kuning suggests a slightly different connection with Alexander, saying it is but a kind of symbolic title: Dapunta Hyang was a conqueror of great ambition and in this respect was like Alexander. He claimed Malaysia, Sumatra, Java, and Myanmar all belonged to him. The problem for Malays has been that he was not Muslim, so he is "denied" in favor of Parameswara, who became Muslim.

28 The transliterated text and George Coedes's quite beautiful translation are given in the Wikipedia entry on the Talang Tuo inscription: Wikipedia, s.v., "Talang Tuo Inscription," last modified December 12, 2021, 00:04 (UTC), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Talang_Tuo_inscription.

29 Zai Kuning's Facebook page, April 6, 2020.

30 Zai Kuning's Facebook page, June 27, 2020. According to Datung Anthony Ratos (2006), miniature canoes are left at graves so that the dead can leave the graves to paddle about freely.

31 Mah Meri have become internationally known, partly through the decades-long efforts by Datung Anthony Ratos to collect their masks and crafts, giving five hundred pieces of *orang asli* works (not only Mah Meri) to national museums so that new generations of both *orang asli* and other Malays can learn about their history. He notes that two artists, Encik Arif bin Embing and Husin a/l Pion, were given scholarships to study at the Vermont Studio Center in the United States in 2002. There are at least four books on *orang asli* wood

art, including a section of Ratos's (2006) book, plus those of Roland Werner (1977), Peter Crowe (2016), and a catalog of the Akademie Pengajian Melayu (n.d.). The tourist gaze and global homogenization of reinvented traditions is considered for the Mah Meri "Main Jo'oh" dance and music by Clare Suet Ching Chan (2015), while Barbara Nowak (2000) pushes back against Malay assertions that Mah Meri have no religion and that the dances are only tourist performances, arguing that Main Jo'oh is central to their belief structure.

Zai returns to "this old sentiment I have," in an April 26, 2020, note on his Facebook page, "the dilemma of Malay hav[ing] to be Muslim—Malay equals Muslim—which lead them to live hypocritical, unnoticed, or in denial." He says he doesn't plan to return to Malaya, the issue being not just the pandemic but how the Malay government handles it with corruption, making him worried about those who live in the inner forest. He wants to write and do more reading about animism to show they are not godless but the protectors of nature as God and have their own moral judgment. It is a different ethos than that of carving masks or devising dances for the tourist market, or that of putting masks in museums for Muslim interpreters, and it need not be just romantic in a world in which *orang asli* increasingly (must) participate in the modern economy, yet might do so without losing themselves.

32 Pleonexia is overreaching, often self-defeating greed. Sahlins (2004) uses it to describe thalassocracies that collapse under their efforts to sustain expansive alliances, his comparative examples being Athens and Bau (Fiji). The global financialized capitalism that destroys our ecologies would seem another example.

CHAPTER 6. RAW MOVES AND LAYERED COMMUNICATION ACROSS THE ARCHIPELAGO SEAS

1 Dancer and choreographer Ricky Sim founded RAW Moves in 2011 as an experimental modern dance and movement company.

2 Podesta's work was performed on February 23–25, 2017; for a video, see Podesta (2017).

3 That is, dancers who are outside the culture industry for tourism, state appropriation, or commercialization.

4 It is suggested that Kuchipudi dance originated with traveling (Brahmin) bards and that in the seventeenth century a monk (Tirtha Narayana Yati) and his disciple (the orphaned Siddhendra Yogi) systematized the dance form, and for a time it was males who did the dancing, setting up tents next to temples. Among the figures who helped revive the form in the 1930s was the American dancer Esther Sherman (Ragini Devi), and in modern times it is often women who dance both male and female roles. Wikipedia, s.v. "Kuchipudi," last modified June 20, 2022, 9:28 (UTC), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kuchipudi. For

the twentieth-century remains of the devadasi traditions in Orissa, see anthropologist Frédérique Apffel-Marglin's (1985) ethnography and analytic account.

5 See Rustom Bharucha's lovely book *Chandralekha* (1995), which includes a detailed account of her life and varied artistic and civic practices, as well as detailed accounts of her earlier choreographies: *Devadasi* (1960, in which she historicized Bharatanatyam against the orthodoxy of deriving it from the politically contested *sadir* of temple dancers or devadasis, and also against the dance-dramas of the Kalakshetra dance school, built on mythological themes and stories), *Angika* (1985, her manifesto of the body in dance, in which various animals teach us the history of the body through the senses), *Navagraha* (1972, linking yoga and the nine planetary deities in a mandala form), *Primal Energy* (1984), *Tillana* (1984, a reprise of the closing segment of *Angika*, which celebrates and brings together different martial arts, yoga, and dance traditions), *Lilavati* (1989, using bees, swans, waterbirds, and the scattering of pearls to reenact Bhaskaracharya's twelfth-century math treatise, the first work with systematic use of the decimal system, which he taught to his daughter, Lilavati), *Prana* (1992, "Breath"; she said, as the "world is short of breath," we must reclaim the art of breathing, and breath is the fourth stage of yoga, which initiates the freeing of the self, coming after the asanas or postures, which require appropriate breathing), *Sri (1994),* and *Yantra* (1994, a tribute to Pina Bausch; see also the lovely account of reconstructing Sri through dancers' memories in Nair [2016]). Bharucha reminds us of two of Chandralekha's messages: (1) "We need art only to the extent that life dehumanizes us. We need art to survive" (quoted in Bharucha 1995, 49); and (2) "I felt that dance doesn't belong to the temple or to the court or even to one's country. It must go back to the people, to the body" (quoted in Bharucha 1995, 70). He also quotes two others of her messages about dance itself: (3) "Only when we are able to see the cosmos not as some external point of reference but something contained within us, only when we begin to see the body as mandala, then only can we hope to fully participate in the aesthetics of our dance tradition" (quoted in Bharucha 1995, 77n24); and (4) "You never make a full movement. It is the eye that has to complete the movement. This creates involvement in seeing, where the spectator becomes a dancer. Seeing should not be passive" (quoted in Bharucha 1995, 82).

6 Padmini Chettur (2017) notes that when she performed *Sharira* at the National Performance Center for the Arts in Bombay, the famous German choreographer Sasha Waltz sat in the last row of the large auditorium and afterward said to her, "I could see every breath that you took." And Chettur remarks, "That is what traveling through space becomes about."

7 *Being* is the name of an "epistolary" exercise (*Exhibit #4*) he did in 2019, which, like the piece discussed here, takes place on a square of water, in which

the male dancer seems to take on the form of a long-legged, exquisite bird, such as a crane. It is a "dance-letter" to Chandralekha and her last choreographic work, *Sharira*. Along the way, the dancer also takes on classic sculptural postures of dance and moves so slowly that "a ripple is often the fastest thing in the room" (Kumar n.d.).

8 For five variants of the ring, octagon, or eight propositions of political wisdom, see appendix 2 in Fischer and Abedi 1990b.

9 The Arabic numeral or glyph 8, said to be derived from Indian glyphs, actually seems to have come into use in tenth-century Andalusia. For an introduction to the cross-cultural history of glyphs for 8 and for the passage of forms from India to Perso-Arabic, and from classical Greek H to the current Latin form (different from the glyph in Arabic), see Wikipedia, s.v. "8", last modified 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/8#Hinduism. See also the eight temples in note 10.

10 Shiva is said to have been worshipped at the Agniswara temple by the fire god, Agni. It is a tenth- to eleventh-century Chola temple. Vazhuvur is the style of Bharatanatyam that Priyadarsin Govind uses, blending in new choreography, different from the traditional style at Kalakshetra. It is said to be more fluid and *lasya* (feminine) than the more geometric clean lines of Pandanallur style. The temple of Vazhuvoor is one of *eight* temples dedicated to Shiva's victories in challenges over eight *asuras* or demons, especially the demon of ignorance, and in this case the inflated egos of the sages or *rishis* who thought their ritual *yagnas* were sufficient to control the world without need for Shiva and the gods. The Vazhuvur temple has a central figure of Shiva as Gajasamhara (*gaja*, "elephant," "slayer of the elephant"). Sages testing Shiva's omnipotence created a rogue elephant to fight Shiva after he had defeated a series of other challengers, and having killed the elephant, Shiva wore its skin, so is also known as Kithivasa, "wearer of the skin." This Chola temple's idol was sculpted in the eleventh century. For the rich and lovely mythology of this temple, see Drishravi (2013).

11 "Chandra[lekha] always joked to us, 'you English educated people!' . . . [T]here were so many ideas of history, politics, identity, aesthetics, that were just absent for us growing up in a regular CBSE [Central Board of Secondary Education] school. And for me those ten years with Chandra, it was really about that" (Chettur 2017).

12 There is a whole other story to be told around the political traditions of Gujurat and North India. Mallika Sarabhai is the daughter of Miralini Sarabhai, the prominent dancer-choreographer, originally from Kerala, and founder in 1949 in Ahmedabad of the Darpana Academy of Performing Arts (with her husband, Vikram Sarabhai, the physicist). She trained in Dalcroze techniques of dance movement in Switzerland and then at Rabindranath Tagore's Shantiniketan, the American Academy of Dramatic Arts, before returning to train

in Bharatanatyam under Meenakshi Sundaram Pillai, and in Kathakali under Guru Thakazhi Kunchu Kurup. She used dance to convince Jawaharlal Nehru to establish the first national commission on female suicides due to dowry debt.

Mallika, aside from taking up the management of the Darpana Academy (she has an MBA from the Indian Institute of Management and a PhD in behavioral organization from Gujarat University), has also run successfully for Parliament and then lost in a valiant effort to unseat the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) candidate for prime minister, L. K. Advani. She dances both classical Bharatanatyam and Kuchipudi but freely breaks barriers among the dance and art forms: "Depending on the subject within the piece, I danced, using different styles of dancing, sang, used masks, told stories, used comedy, etc. It was the *total theatre* that is spoken about in our *shastras*" (Sarabhai 2014). Her first important work was *Shakti: The Power of Women* (1989), and she famously played *Draupadi* in Peter Brooks's nine-hour *Mahabharata*. She argues that dance provides a language that can break through barriers of prejudice, misogyny, caste injustice, and patriarchy and demonstrates some of her delightful, yet pointed, technique in her TEDIndia talk, "Dance to Change the World" (2009), and in her dance *The Colors of My Heart,* which has had hundreds of performances and traveled all over the world as well as within India.

13 I am reminded of the complaints of Anquetil Duperron, one of the first translators of Zoroastrian scriptures, that the priests for months would teach him only one letter at a time.

14 *Shringara*, *hasya*, *karuna*, *raudra*, *veera*, *bhayanaka*, *bibhatsya*, *adbutha*, and *shantha*.

15 Leela Samson has an interesting background: the daughter of Vice Admiral Benjamin Abraham Samson, of the Bene Israel community of Pune, and Laila Samson, a Gujarati Roman Catholic from Ahmedabad, and a sister of her father, Annie, who was principal of Anjum-e Islam Muslim school for girls in Bombay. Her father was a naval officer and became commandant of the National Defense Academy in 1959–62, located just south of Pune. She herself was born in Coonoor, in the Nilgiris Hills of Tamil Nadu, and at age nine was sent to Kalakshetra to learn dance under Rukmini Devi Arundale and to Besant Theosophical High School. She went to Sophia College in Bombay. Aside from heading the Kalakshetra in Chennai, she also headed the Sangeet Natak Akademi in New Delhi.

On Priyadarsin Govind, see note 10. There was one more, whose name I cannot seem to recover from my field notes or tape, possibly Mudhari Mugar.

16 These are three strong but complicated women, ripe for reinterpretation away from the shadows of blame in their oft-told traditional forms. Sita chose her husband, Rama, in a *swyamvar* (contest through which a bride picks the best suitor) and maintained her purity through abduction and fire. Shurpanaka, the sister of Ravana, the demon king, both violated caste rules by marrying a

non-*raksha* and then attempted (unsuccessfully) to seduce Rama during his fourteen-year exile in the forest. Keikeyi, a skilled warrior who saved her husband's life in battle, is the one who had Rama sent away to the forest for fourteen years, thus beginning the intricate tales of the *Ramayana*. She did this for ill-conceived reasons to protect her own son, bringing almost universal blame on herself but unintentionally fulfilling the cosmic plan to protect Rama and destroy the demon Ravana.

17 *Chandalika* is based on a Buddhist story, but Rabindranath Tagore turns the story into a humanist study of conflicts within a marginalized protagonist (an untouchable) portrayed as a person of growing self-understanding and moral dignity, rather than a fable about spirituality or a charter for the status quo. Sutapa Chaudhuri (2010) notes that in Tagore's dance dramas, "plain speech progressively develops into heightened speech . . . into emotionally charged songs, and the corresponding action is transformed artistically into dance" and that "dance thus becomes a medium that liberates the soul and the body from a repressive culture that negates her identity, self-worth, and female desire." Chandalika "only arrives at a true understanding of her own self and the world by journeying through experience, through making errors in judgment, asserting herself, and making active choices."

EPILOGUE

1 The quotation is Rumi's famous opening line in the *Masnavi*.

2 "The happy times are tethered to the rhythms of the lunisolar calendar which are themselves tied to the lives of insects. *Li qui*, the nominal start of autumn, in early August, is also the time when the crickets in eastern China undergo their seventh and final molt. They are now mature and sexually active, and males are able to sing and . . . ready to fight" (Raffles 2010, 87). These conveyances of culture are scattered through Raffles's chapter "Generosity (the Happy Times)" (74–115). On the other side of the globe, by contrast, in Niger, there is not only a seasonal correlate but a failing large-scale technoscientific one: "The internationally-funded . . . elaborate trans-Sahelian locust-monitoring network, the early warning system designed to give protection to those adjacent to what is not just a [war] zone of conflict but also a zone of distribution, a point from which the *criquet pèlerin*, the most destructive of the Sahelian locusts, swarms west and south . . . across the Sahel and through the Arabian Peninsula as far as India, and the only zone[s] in which there is perhaps some slim chance of controlling the animal's development . . . are in places commonly rendered inaccessible by conflict" (209).

3 A 2014 study published in *Nature* modeled the effects of carbon dioxide on extreme Indian Ocean dipoles in 1961, 1994, and 1997 (Uchoa and BBC's Visual Journalism teams, 2019).

4 I'm partly thinking of Carlos Fausto's (2020) account of Amazonian art effects as working through indices in contradistinction to icons, and even more of Christianity's preoccupation with icons and making spirit "present," something that he suggests contributes to missionaries' antagonism to what they misunderstood as idols and devils.

5 For one listing of the twenty-four solar units and their correlation with the agricultural cycles, see https://www.yourchineseastrology.com/calendar/24-solar-terms.htm. For some traditional Chinese paintings of these elements of awakening insects, see *China Daily* (2017). The lunar year shifts relative to the solar year, so that Chinese New Year can occur between January 20 and February 20. The sixty-year lunar cycle is popularly known by the zodiac animal names plus the names of the five elements plus the sequence number in the sixty years.

6 Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, popularly known as Ahok, a Christian of Chinese ethnic descent, became governor in 2014 when his predecessor and ally, Joko Widodo, became president. He had tried to counter hard-line political Muslim attacks, led by the militant Hizb ut-Tahrir group, that the Qur'an prohibited Muslims from voting for a non-Muslim. He was convicted of blasphemy and of insulting Islam for saying that they were misleading Muslims about what the Qur'an says. He was given a prison sentence harsher than even the prosecutors had requested. It was a shocking judicial conviction in a nominally secular country whose Muslim majority has prided itself on tolerance, but under the presidency of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (2004–14), the number of blasphemy convictions skyrocketed to 106 (among many reports, see, e.g., Cochrane 2017).

7 Behrouz Boochani's *No Friend but the Mountains* (2018) won him two national prizes in Australia but no release from Manus detention or asylum. In 2019 he obtained a New Zealand visa and remains there after it expired.

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Cover art: Entang Wiharso, *Flag of Surrender* (detail), 2021. Acrylic paint and glitter on canvas, 210 × 520 cm. Courtesy of the artist and Black Goat Studios.

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